

CHANTICLEER
A Pastoral Romance



Violette Hall



"JUST THEN HE OPENED THE DOOR."

Frontispiece. See page 304.

A wide, ornate border of repeating floral and leaf motifs surrounds the central text area.

CHANTICLEER

A PASTORAL ROMANCE

By Violette Hall



ILLUSTRATED BY
W. GRANVILLE SMITH

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TO THE FADED IN SPIRIT





“***T**O be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and truth. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically.”*

HENRY DAVID THOREAU.





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CHANTICLEER



CHAPTER I

THE train was not due until six o'clock, but I was so impatient for Roger's coming that I started out to meet him at two. It was one of those transcendently beautiful days in May which in retrospect seem too lovely to have touched this humdrum existence.

Jerry brought my trap to the door at, as I have said, two o'clock, and I drove off with the full intention of rounding Robin Hood's barn. This included calling on some farmer neighbours at the Forge, six miles to the south of our country place, which we called Agawam. Frosty started up the turnpike with a gait that dissimulated respectable



speed, and I gorged myself on the peaceful aspect of the humble farm homes we passed. Rambling old houses that had once been white, but which time and weather had worn to a soft grey, stood well back from the road at the end of long, straight paths, bordered with gay tulips and sweet hyacinths. The little dooryards were tangles of bridal-wreath and blossoming almond shrubs. Great lilac bushes tossed their long plumes of purple and white bloom against the parlour windows arrogantly or stood as screens to protect the calm content of some especially unpretentious spot. Occasionally a sleek cat came out on a sunny porch to strike a note of life. The poor, mean homes, crowned with the extravagance of May beauty, moved me painfully. I was glad to turn off into the narrow roadway that winds between the larger and richer fruit farms.

Nature had her own way here with no ungracious comparisons. For long miles there

were no houses in sight, only rolling meadows of dazzlingly green verdure and fragrant acres of apple blossoms, level stretches when the eye could see on either hand nothing but these garlanded trees. Their heavily laden boughs met over my head as I drove on. The undulating fields sank back from high knolls, deeply rosy, into delicate hollows of soft waxen glory only pink-flushed.

The æsthetic intemperance made my soul reel. Whether I was drunken or mad it would be hard to say. Oh, to be a poet, my spirit cried — as if a poet has ever touched mid-May! Oh, to be a painter — as if May-day, more than music, could penetrate canvas! In this state of delirium I arrived at the old Clinchbeck farm.

These people were our nearest acquaintances, though they were six miles away. Here, too, the house was sunning itself with the windows of its being open to the odours of lilac and blossoms and new grass.



I found the women of the family busy — very busy. It was “house-cleaning time” they told me, and all through my curtailed visit, there in those Elysian fields, I could hear the sharp click of hammers and the swish swash of beating carpets. Mrs. Decker and one of her daughters, — she has four, — both with their hair freshly brushed, came into the musty parlour to see me and to offer apologies for the others who “must be excused.” My spirit rose in rebellion at their stolidity. But, after I had bidden the mother farewell on the porch, Miss Amanda came down to the roadside to watch my going. As I was untying Frosty she caught my arm with an impulsive, hard-handed grasp. She was looking off into the fragrant orchards with tears in her eyes. “Ain’t it nice?” she said dreamily. “It hurts, though. Sometimes I think I can’t live through May. It’s so — so nice.”

In my bewildered surprise I wondered



how much of the eternal splendours we all of us tack down under our carpets. When she had spoken Amanda Decker shrank back, as if afraid of a touch upon that bit of her soul inadvertently laid bare. I ached to say something, but I was dazed and altogether inadequate. After I hastily scrambled into my trap I leaned over and whispered, "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." I wonder what made me! Amanda nodded her head gravely and went back to her house-cleaning.

Frosty dashed off into the floral glory, I throbbing to appreciate it, my twin soul sordidly washing paint. My way lay around by the old covered bridge, and the still older stone arches that span the creek at Lisle. I had made a circuit of twelve miles when I drove up to the little mountain railway station. Presently the narrow-gauge train, pert and independent, tooted into sight. Frosty was too scornful of its size even to



prick up his ears. In a minute more recognition disentangled Roger from a group of restless travellers. I waved my whip at him, and he rushed toward me with a look of earnestness that three days in the city had stamped about his country-loving eyes. The apple blossoms had opened while he had been away, and as we drove over the high road, through much the same scenes as I had passed at its other end, I told him as well as I could something of my drive through the great orchards to Clinchbeck. I felt that I could only be puerile and inadequate with such a theme, but it did not matter, for my husband was not listening. He was looking — looking greedily with misty eyes.

Presently I said: “It was so wonderful, Roger. A little more and I should have been a poet. As it was, I did think something rather fine about putting down carpets.”



Roger made no answer. It was clear that he could not be interested in the thoughts appropriate to the place and the hour that I had come so near to thinking, when he knew he was actually in their grasp himself. We were both too absorbed in the charm of outside conditions for much articulate speech. We drove along, mile after mile, almost dumbly. Suddenly I startled Roger by saying, "Where is our house?"

"On the Old King's Road. Why do you ask?" he returned indifferently.

"But where, Roger?" I persisted. "We have passed the sentinel pine and the willow copse. There is the second pine. But where is Agawam?"

Roger looked about him with keener interest: "That must be the first pine. It looks like the sentinel to me."

"No," I reiterated. "It is the second. Where is our house?"

Roger was still peering from one side of



the road to the other. "There is Jerry watching for us," he said.

Our man came out from a clump of cedars by the roadside. "Jerry," I called, "where is our house?"

"Burnt up," he said.

"Nonsense!" I cried. "It was not burned when I left there at two o'clock."

"No, but it busted out right afterward. When I took the coal up to the study grate the hull chimbley was blazin'. 'Must 'a' been what they call a detective fluke."

We knew that when one has a flue to blame for a fire it is like heart failure as a cause of death; it is just as well to think more than is said.

"When you discovered it was it too far gone for the garden hose?" Roger asked, as something seemed to be expected of him. His answer was a contemptuous sniff. Then he inquired, "Did you save anything?"



*"THERE WAS HALF OF ONE OF THE GAME
PLATTERS."*



“Yes, yes,” said Jerry. “Wait till you see.”

We drove hurriedly up the little distance to where, by the side of what had once been our home, was a motley pile of broken bits presided over by our cook and the housemaids.

While Roger gave Frosty into Jerry’s hands I ran up to examine the first large bundle. It was full of fragments of china. Evidently a tablecloth had been packed with my new dinner service and thrown out of a window. There was half of one of the game platters, but almost everything else was powder. “We saved the curtains,” Jane proclaimed, pointing to a torn heap at her feet.

“You pulled them down?” I said.

“You didn’t expect us to get out a step-ladder an’ take ’em down careful, with the house burnin’ over our heads, I s’pose,” the cook interposed savagely.



I took Roger's arm and walked him toward the barn whither Jerry had already disappeared with Frosty. "We have not a whole thing left in the world," I said, "except a barn."

"Where shall we stay the night?" he asked. "I should not like to lodge in any of the houses about here, except in the very places where they would not take pay."

"The Deckers are cleaning house," I hesitated. "And they are six miles away. Roger, we must occupy the carriage-house side of the barn to-night. It is large and airy. We can have plenty of hay for beds, and there are the lap robes for blankets."

"We can't eat hay," Roger returned gloomily.

"But we can make tea of it," I replied. "The very best calves are fed with hay tea."

My husband's answer was a scornful look. Presently he remarked, "We might go and see if any food has been saved."



We went back to the ruins. The maids had gone off and seated themselves by the roadside with the air of complete repudiation. We began rather listlessly handling over battered tin basins and disabled iron-mongery until Roger suddenly found a canister of tea.

“Look!” he shouted triumphantly.

And I, at that very instant, picked out of a broken tureen a can of potted quail and a box of sardines.

“I think that is the lower part of the refrigerator back there by the grape trellis,” my husband called out. “There ought to be something in that.”

We ran up to it together. It was the most exciting marketing we had ever done. The knob of the door was gone, but Roger pried it open by inserting a stick in the hole. Sure enough, there was plenty — not appetising plenty, I will confess, for the refrigerator had evidently had rough han-



dling and its contents were much shaken. But there were some cold vegetables that could be heated, and part of a battered pie which Roger declared was still possible.

“If we could only find the bread-box intact we need not complain,” I said. And, before my husband had time to answer, he held it up to me above a heap of chairbacks and screen frames.

“Is it filled?” I called.

“One whole loaf, one half, three rolls, and two biscuits,” he chanted.

“Suppose we have a meal,” I said. “I am starved, and you certainly must be. There is plenty of wood to burn, but where shall we build a fire?”

“Over where the chimney stood,” Roger answered, nodding toward that mangled piece of masonry.

We sent the maids to the carriage-house to prepare our beds. Then we made ready the meal. I think we were both conscious

that we ought to be depressed; but, rather, we chatted like magpies while, with their cunning cupidity, we groped through our shattered possessions for usable remnants of dishes. Finally we found among the kitchen crockery two parts of plates and as many cups that would hold a few thimblefuls while lying on their sides. There were some battered tin pans for cooking purposes and a pail, too, for the tea. Then we improvised a table from a trunk that had been carefully saved, although it was the only empty one in our attic. This we carried to the chimney-place and laid our meal upon it as fast as it was ready. We drew up to the fire, which was more cheerful than one might have expected, made up as it was of the odds and ends of our household goods.

After we had partaken heartily of potted quail, bread and sardines, tea and pie, — Roger ate the pie, — we called the servants

for their share. Meanwhile we strolled down to inspect our sleeping arrangements. The carriage-house door, which could be swung back to unwall the entire end of the main lower room, was opened now to face our fragrant, dewy orchard and great, mysterious spaces of star-specked heaven. Jerry had been down to the grove and cut piles of balmy boughs to make delightfully odorous foundations for our hay-couches.

There was a lighted lantern above the door; everything was as ready for us as the suddenness of the situation allowed. "How inviting those beds seem," I said, and then we sat down together on the low step and looked off into the wonders of sky and orchard. We remained there for a long time, perfectly hushed.

"I feel so free," Roger said at last, "absolutely irresponsible and free."

"So do I," I whispered back.

We were quiet again for a long time.

Finally Roger said: "The house wasn't insured. We should feel very poor."

I looked steadily before me at the beauties of the night. "Poor?" I repeated.

Roger corrected himself. "What the world would call poor. Our next venture must be more modest, Molly. We may have to rent, for a time. If they had managed to save a little furniture it would have been useful. Think what it means to begin stocking a home again, from a corkscrew to a piano."

"But how sordid details jar upon this night!" I exclaimed. "You realise it as thoroughly as I. Laboriously stock a home again! Why taint the solemn mystery of life with flatirons and canned tomatoes?"

"Think of dashing the hopes of a morning with a cup of warm coffee, or of an evening with a dish of tea," he quoted. "That sort of thing was all very well for Thoreau, but for us — why, we have

friends, with claims. I am afraid, my dear, his precepts cannot shape our lives. How much did that glorious freedom of Walden cost him, anyway, in dollars and cents? But then, you know, I could not raise beans for market."

"Twenty-seven cents a week," I said, ignoring the beans. "And he was able to swear that he enjoyed his life to the very core. Think of uninterrupted weeks to draw inspiration from nature's heart." I thought that rather a disgusting figure, so I talked pretty fast just then. "Think of how we have to entertain distracting house-parties at Agawam, to pay for equally irritating entertainments at our friends'. Think of our winters in the city, with those loathsome cups of lukewarm five o'clock tea, and dinners in roasting hot dining-rooms. Thoreau said, and we know he spoke sincerely: 'The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescrib-

able as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched.' ”

There was another long silence. Then Roger said: “I could finish my novel in two weeks, undisturbed. Shall we fly to the wild woods, Molly? ”

“Oh, that I had the wings of a dove,” I cried, “for then would I flee away and be at rest.”

“We will,” Roger said, and his head dropped forward in a sort of ecstacy. “We will,” he repeated with intense tragedy as if he were playing a part on the dramatic stage.

I had accused him of jarring detail, but I am sorry to say I struck in here with, “We will build our shanty at once in the primeval forest. When one thinks of it, how little is absolutely necessary to supply simple creature comforts — food, lodging, and raiment with no margin beyond the re-

quirements of health. The great panorama of nature will supply our æsthetic joys unpaid. Do you remember how our master says: 'Men will go farther and pay more to see a tawdry picture on canvas, a poor painted scene, than to behold the fairest or grandest scene that nature ever displays, in their immediate vicinity, although they may never have seen it in their lives' ? If we have a few of our choicest books with us, we shall need nothing else but ourselves and a fire on the hearth. Thoreau used molasses for sweetening instead of sugar." My voice had arisen to the question pitch. Roger only looked his answer. "He had a tailoress make his trousers," I went on. "His entire wardrobe cost him only twelve dollars a year. You wouldn't want me to make your clothes, would you, dear?"

Roger looked again. So then I left the conversation to him. He amused himself by quoting such sayings as seemed to bolster

his hesitancy, from our long-time mentor and our fast-evolving model, as: “ ‘It is not necessary that a man should earn his living by the sweat of his brow, unless he sweats easier than I do.’ ‘If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured, or far away.’ ”

It was so mysteriously beautiful, there in the starlight and the bloom, that we talked spasmodically on until very late. I saw that Roger's mood was for nothing practical, so I emancipated myself, too, from every thought of molasses and home-made trousers.

When at last we went to rest upon our sweet spicy beds, our fancies had taken root in a far tangled woodland that we knew. When we fell asleep we had each caught a generous slice of rainbow in our eager hands,

CHAPTER II

THE illusion was not dispelled when our eyes unclosed with the first stirring of the new day. We had left the great door of our shelter thrown back, and we returned to consciousness in the soft flutter of a glorious May-day's birth. Vision wandered buoyantly through the pink and grey mysteries of a wide skyseape where a gentle cloud-play enthralled us; shifting, massing, dividing again, then piling high in delicate tones of soft grey and pink, from rose to mother-of-pearl, all magically outlined with that subtle glory that is to colour what odour is to flowers. It is the liquid aureoles of saints, I think. This mystic brilliancy dashed about the frail cloud-wonders until that unutter-



able moment when the sun burst forth. I covered my eyes with my hands. Roger groaned. Already we were strung to the highest pitch of strained æstheticism. That mad May-day carnival of bird song had awakened us when the first streak of light touched to life the song sparrow in the maple copse. He gave the key and then — the orchard awoke.

Hours of liquid melody came to us, sweet as honey, clear as crystal, high and low, a wild tangle of delicious trills.

The sun touched the flower-crowned orchard, the fragrance arose in gusts that made me cry out rapturously. Then my eyes looked off upon the brilliantly green meadows sparkling with dew. I was giddy and faint.

We both staggered when we tried to dress. Roger said it was from our cramping beds. I declared it was May. For one instant, as I gazed down into those sloping orchards

and pastures, a great thought began painfully to unfold, and, lo, Roger moved across the floor for his shoes.

“O Roger!” I cried. “I was just about to say something wonderful — marvellous, like that down there! And then you creaked the floor.”

“I was only getting my shoes,” he said. Then he pinched my cheek. “It is always so,” he mocked, but half seriously, too, “in this repressed life. We must wait for the great words, I am afraid, until we move with our thoughts on pinions. We cannot lop off the feet of clay. Don’t you remember Sainte-Beuve’s saying, ‘Every one contains a dead poet in his soul’?”

Roger’s most serious vice is that he has no belief in my unborn wisdom. He declares I say enough to gratify him, as it is. Now he changed the subject indulgently. “Do you still feel free, dear, or have you begun to regret our lost fleshpots?”



“Regret?” I echoed. “Why, do you know, this would have been sweeping-day if — if our house had lived.”

We laughed derisively in memory of those mornings of clotted dust. “No more watching of maids in that evil hour,” I cried. “Royal Worcester and Sèvres, willow ware and Favrile glass, — I am your slave no longer.”

“The bearskin rug and the royal tiger will harbour no moths now,” Roger shouted buoyantly. He whistled a few jubilant bars, I following as well as I could for laughing.

I had been looking out of the side window, and I now called my husband to me. “Look there,” I said, pointing to a small, one-storied storehouse, “the very thing for our Walden.”

“Why, my dear,” he expostulated, “don’t you know how I tried to use that for a study? It is too small.”



“I remember,” I answered rather stiffly, “that you went to the expense of having a chimney built to make a fireplace, and then abandoned it, not because it was too small, but because you found more inspiration in the tower-room of Agawam. This is as large as the great man’s Walden. It would do amply for us if we built a little wing for sleeping-space.”

“As you like,” my husband returned. “All I ask is liberty, and cover sufficient to keep the rain out of my ink-bottle.”

Our maids had been cared for, the night before, at Jerry’s tiny home in the neighbourhood. The first thing that we attended to, the next morning, was to despatch them back to the city whence they had come, and then, as our groom was fortunately taking a vacation at the time, we were soon set free from plans to go to town ourselves.

I wanted to buy a new copy of “Walden” for a guide as to just what would be abso-

lutely necessary articles for our experiment. Roger had considerable business to attend to, and then there was the disagreeable task before us of giving an account of ourselves, our loss, and our schemes to our only near relative, Roger's brother Maurice.

"I hate to stand and deliver to that boy," Roger said, as we left the train and the time for it drew near. "He is so practical and so prosperous, and so — young. I know he thinks me a visionary destined to failure."

"And, unhappily, tied to an equally deluded wife," I laughed. "I am as nervous, too, as if he had some right to be our censor. Do you not think it would be wise if we bought our effects before we see him? We should feel more as if we were irrevocably committed then."

Roger followed me into the first house-furnishing shop we came to, after we had procured a copy of "Walden," although he



protested, "I should not have been dissuaded, anyway."

I do not accuse my husband of cowardice, nor any man in like predicament, but I do know that delicate matters generally shape themselves so that some woman is the sole actor in the scene. Roger had tiresome business to call him to the far end of town, and after our shopping was concluded there seemed really no other place so convenient for me in which to wait for him as at Maurice's office.

Our brother is a young physician with a large and important practice. His consulting and waiting rooms were crowded when I arrived with my conciliatory smile, but Maurice had me shown into his little private reception room, where he said he would soon come to me, as his office hours were nearly over. I hoped against hope that he would not be disengaged before Roger arrived. As I sat there in hushed silence,



framing our confession to my brother-in-law, logically, sensibly, as I could do so then, my hands grew icily cold, my heart fluttered painfully. Stern disapproval and emotional enthusiasm are unequal foes to meet. I said to myself over and over that we were not a pair of naughty children to be snubbed by this chit. It did me so much good to think of Maurice as a boy that I wonder it had no more tonic effect upon me. But when I heard his autocratic step crossing the hall to me, it made no difference that it was elastic with youth. It was that of a man of the world, and my artistic soul trembled before it.

He shook hands with me again, saying cordially, "I am very glad to see you, Mary." Then he seated himself on the padded leather divan beside me, with his usual elegant ceremony, no trace of surprise in his manner that I should have interrupted him in a busy morning.



I turned about to face him. "We have had an accident," I began.

"Oh," he asked with eager interest, evidently thinking his medical aid was sought, "is it you or Roger?"

"Our house," I answered, smiling at his gravity; "our house was burned last night."

"Not much burned, I imagine, from your face," he laughed.

"Burned down," I replied stoutly.

There was something indefinable of reproof in his handsome young face, as he said solemnly, "This must be a real blow to Roger."

I shook my head. Where were that sense and that logic that I had conned like a lesson not a half-hour before? "Roger does not care either," I said. I think it must have been a little hysterical, but I was aware that I was smiling broadly, so pleased did I seem at our misfortune.

Maurice was silent. He simply gazed



at me wonderingly. Finally I stammered, "A house like that is a great care. We had so many valuable things, don't you know?"

"So I supposed," he returned coldly.

"Our wedding-gifts alone, silver and glass and china, were enough to drive one demented. And then that rich bachelor uncle of mine in Chicago is always sending us care-laden gifts — rare canvases, or tapestries, or bronzes. We are going to build a hut on Roger's camping property, to get away from it all," I cried in one crazy outburst.

Maurice smiled. "Is there no way to stay this reprehensible uncle, short of hiding from him in the woods?"

"But you don't understand. It is the woods that we want; a wild, free life under natural conditions."

"Yes, Mary. You might enjoy, a little later in the season, a few weeks of camping.

But, for the present, you must come to me.” This provident youth had a whole establishment of his own. “Consider this your home until Agawam is rebuilt.”

“Agawam rebuilt!” I echoed. Were we going to be routed, at the eleventh hour, after all, by this determined business spirit? “We will never build again even as near civilisation as that. We both believe domestic conditions are growing too complex for any sort of comfortable living. This is due wholly to unreasonable pride,” I declaimed, in platform earnestness. “The vice urges us to live beyond our means, with consequent mental agony. It puts thumbscrews on fireside happiness, in the servant question. It has degraded labour. Competency looks higher now than the kitchen. Our experiment will prove to the world how little of this nervous strain to make both ends meet is really necessary to insure happy and healthful living for a congenial



couple of wide interests. We wish, too, to elevate honest toil."

"I believe you are in earnest, Mary," he replied with patient indulgence. "But when the first snow flurry comes, I will see that my pleasantest spare rooms are in order for you."

"Maurice," I answered, "you vex me. Do you suppose if I could not stand the woods in winter, I could the life in a village? For years we have sought, in the fall, the largest city we could find — New York, when it was not Paris, or London. I know the hideous monotony of a suburban town, and I pity you, shut up here, when the whole country outside is blossoming and bird-thrilled."

Maurice crossed the room and sat down by a table laden with the alluring volumes he has no time to read. "Won't you, at least, Mary, accept my hospitality until Roger has your — your camp ready for you?"

“Thank you,” I said, “you are very kind, but we go to-morrow to the woods.”

“You will be lonely,” he answered. “I shall run out for a Sunday now and then, during the summer, if I can pull away. And probably others will come too.”

I am afraid I winced. Then I murmured, “You will be welcome, but we shall not be lonely.”

“Last night, you said, Mary?” Maurice ejaculated presently. “Why did you not come right here?”

I hesitated. I did not like to say we preferred our barn. And just then Roger bustled in upon the conversation. He was so elated that, for a moment, he forgot his brother’s inconvenient sense. “What do you think?” he cried; “the luckiest thing! I got down there in Water Street just as they were wrecking the disabled steamer—you remember, Maurice, the excursion steamer *Caroline*, that a drunken pilot ran



on the rocks last summer. Well, Molly, I bought two of those old state-rooms, a pair of bunks in each. Won't they be just the thing to complete our shanty? One put on each end of the corn-house, like wings."

"Splendid," I returned, eyeing Maurice.
"Don't you think, Roger, we would better go now?"

CHAPTER III

THE camping-ground which we were to make our future home was a bit of wild woodland lying along the creek Jan Vosenkill, about ten miles nearer the rugged mountains that had outlined our horizon at Agawam.

A few years previously Roger had been one of a party of five artist friends to purchase fifteen acres of this prospective sportsman's paradise. There was very little hunting there — mostly squirrels and rabbits — and there had been still less fishing originally, but the cold, clear stream was an excellent one for trout, and the new landowners had been stocking it for the past season or two generously, so that now the

fascinating fish lured by their size and numbers as well as by their captivating coyness. Although each of the sportsmen owned his own three acres of land with defined boundaries, each year they had camped for a few weeks in a body.

Roger's intention now was to preëempt his own acres for our home. Two men went with Jerry to transport the corn-house, and to assist Roger in erecting it after I had selected a desirable location.

My husband and I arrived at the Vosenkill several hours before the men came, so that we had plenty of time to consider where the house should stand. After changing our minds many times, — for there was an embarrassing choice, — we finally selected a tall, rugged pine to keep guard over us and to send its spicy, invigorating odours in at our windows. We stood on the great, lichen-covered rock under the rustling pine to listen to the noisy flow of the Vosenkill,



sparkling lustrously here and there where there was a break in the trees and the tall underbrush. Before us spread out that tangle of woodland glory that nature lovers crave to keep them healthy; squawberry vines running their red riot through moss and fern, tall brakes scenting the air subtly, vitally, alder bushes rustling softly, spruces and hickory with, now and then, a chestnut in majestic outline, seemed to give out a reticent welcome to us who loved them with all the abandon of childhood.

“I have often waited in our house for you, Roger,” I said finally, after it had grown painful to care so much for these woods, “but it is a new sensation to wait for the house.”

“All our sensations will be new now,” my husband replied. “We have never begun life before in full maturity. What shall we make of it, Mary? Failure or success?”



"THAT TANGLE OF WOODLAND GLORY"

“Success,” I answered.

And then Roger turned his head and said,
“Here comes our house.”

Crashing through low, overhanging hemlocks, banging against fern-covered rocks, now slipping down a bank of moss, then thrusting two wheels in mid-air to clear some projecting coil of roots, came the long lumber wagon that held our home and also the three workmen. The state-rooms we had left in town to be entirely renovated with fresh paint and paper. The men would have to come out to us once more to complete the building, but we could not wait in the village until all this was done.

When the four men were setting up our house, I heard Jerry say to my husband, “I do’ know what it means, sir, your comin’ here, when you’re used to that nice house, an’ the hosses an’ all, sir.”

Roger looked perplexed for a moment. It seemed a difficult task to attempt to ex-



pand that narrow ignorance to encompass our point of view. "I do regret selling the horses," he answered, "but that is all. That fine house meant a great deal of care as well as expense to us, Jerry. Don't you remember how hard it was to keep the place looking as nice as we wanted it? Shrubbery would not grow well in that soil, nor grass under the trees. And have you forgotten how the cook and one of the maids left my wife last summer when she had a houseful of guests? And the time when sneak-thieves broke in and carried off a chest of silver before they went to the barn and took Frosty's best harness?"

Jerry felt somewhat responsible for the harness, so he answered glibly, "O yes, sir. There's bad luck in this world for ev'ry-body."

"Have you never thought," Roger went on, "that some day, by working hard now and denying yourself a great deal, you will



have laid by enough to rest and take life easily?"

"I guess ev'rybody builds them kind o' air-castles," Jerry grinned rather sheepishly.

Roger nodded. "Of course they do. It is human nature. But are they very often realised? Don't you find that your friends usually work themselves into their graves before the happy time of ease comes? Well, we are not going to wait for that some day. It is here now. We have laid aside every unnecessary care. Now I am sure that you really do not enjoy for yourself that Brussels carpet you bought last week, but you thought you must get it to be as respectable as the Ryans."

"That's true, sir. I mean, my girl — she wanted it, account o' th' Ryanses."

"Exactly. We shall not even know here what the Ryans have. We love the woods, my wife and I, more than anything in the

world, and we mean to enjoy them, free from every useless worry. There will be no anxiety about making both ends meet here. We shall keep easily in advance of our income, not be always panting to catch up with it."

Jerry's eyes were becoming a little dazed, and Roger said quickly: "Do you ever realise how few of the things you strain so hard to buy are really indispensable? We believe that an unreasonable pride brings much useless misery into the world. You won't let your boys run barefooted in summer, as you did yourself — though their toes ache with the heat, and their shoes are a tax upon your wages — simply because labourers' sons no longer do that. The same spirit has governed us. We have lived up to our friends, but we have come to our senses at last."

I had been regretting ever since my conversation with Maurice, that I did not quote



to him what Marcus Aurelius said so aptly upon this point: "I have often wondered how it comes to pass that everybody should love themselves best, and yet value their neighbours' opinion about themselves more than their own." Men of our brother's stamp are much more impressed by the word of a great man, especially if it is an old great man, than by their contemporaneous relatives' opinion. In fact, with ourselves, I know the farther we go back for our own mental props the surer does the foundation of our beliefs seem to be. But that is clearly not so with Jerry, and I always say my sage things to the wrong person. When I quoted the ancient wise man who persecuted Christians to the ignorant modern who is good to horses, there seemed no understanding between them.

Our ex-coachman merely said ambiguously, "Some folks are built that way," before he excluded me pointedly by tacking



his next remark on to Roger's last one: "Excuse me, sir, but I'm thinkin' 'bout this time next year. Can I ast ye then which way is best?"

"Indeed you may, Jerry. That is a just demand," Roger answered, turning abruptly to look down into a field below us. "I mean to have that ploughed up and set out in early vegetables," he said. "We shall enjoy tending them, as well as eating them. Whom could I get to do it?"

Each of the three listeners had a farmer to suggest. One was settled upon, and his special advocate delegated to engage his services.

Still smarting as we were from the domestic discomforts that even sweeping-day insured in our late complicated system of housekeeping, we were amazed at the ease with which we slipped into our new environment. We were determined to begin with only such encumbrances of domestic living



as were absolutely indispensable for most primitive comfort, then, from time to time, to add to our store anything of this sort that extended experience seemed to demand. There was to be not one superfluity to require care. The poorest immigrant could hardly begin housekeeping on a more limited scale. We had no pictures. There could be no need of canvases to collect dust and to be mocked by the great gallery of ever-changing masterpieces nature had hung about us. Neither did we require receptacles in which to watch the dropping and decay of the floral splendours which we had the possibility of seeing in the first, fresh beauty of the woods and pastures. We expected to collect a few good books in time, but even here it was curious to note how little printed lore such omnivorous readers as we were craved when we had so much mental food furnished at first hand.

Our living-room was of this simple ar-



rangement: dazzlingly fresh white walls and ceilings, a bare pine floor scoured to its whitest possibilities, a table of the same wood and the same cleanliness. On the latter we placed a student's lamp and some books, when it was not in use as a dining-table; when it was I spread it with a square of heavy white crash and the few indispensable dishes of substantial ware that were needed to serve most simply our meal of one course and, usually, of one dish — something appetising and nutritious, nothing more. We had not come to Eden to waste one precious moment with unnecessary cooking and dish-washing.

When Roger first saw me undertaking this last imperative bit of sordid detail he said, "I hate to see you do that, Molly. Would it not seem less ignominious if we called it cleansing instead of washing?"

"I heard you lecture Jerry, only this morning, upon the subject of foolish pride,"



I answered, diving with my novice's hand after the soap. "I call it dish-washing."

"So do I," said Roger.

To go back to the matter of our furnishing. Besides the table, our living-room held four large easy-chairs of wicker with comfortable cushions, one for each of us and two others for possible guests, intermixed with a few smaller seats; and upon the narrow mantel, over the open fireplace where our simple cookery was done, a clock and a pair of bedroom candlesticks. Not another thing to be kept clean and to distract the eye from the marvels of sight that our broad windows and our open door disclosed.

The two bedrooms adjoining the chief room, one on each side, had, besides their upper and lower berths luxuriously fitted with the best of springs and hair mattresses, good linen and soft blankets, merely a chair in each, a washstand with necessary toilet articles, a small mirror and a



hanging shelf, besides a set of drawers and a row of hooks. Nothing could be simpler, and still no avenue to cleanliness or comfortable sleeping was closed.

Our first purchase was decidedly utilitarian. It was a cow. We had a little shed built for her down in a hollow where it might not be seen from the house, and learning to milk furnished both the comedy and the tragedy of several of our earliest days. I have never seen Roger so boyishly boastful as when he had mastered that homely art. He acquired it before I did — in fact, I did not acquire it at all, when I saw how willing he was to pay the price of his superiority.

Then we bought some chickens, and, with our own hands, built a home for them adjoining the cow-shed. Did ever the last touch of architectural splendour on some stately palace shed such awesome satisfaction upon its promoters as did this work of ours when,



at last, we had made it sufficiently secure to really hold our feathered possessions?

I shall never forget the face of calm content with which Roger came to me one morning to announce: "Molly, they are all there. Not one missing."

I sat down on the doorstep. The news seemed almost prostrating. "To think of that!" I cried. "Why, once I could not drive a nail straight or draw a screw. And now —"

"Yes," Roger said, walking away, "you helped me considerably, Mary."

Those were Elysian days, when even the homely details were touched with the glory of Eden. We almost forgot that man had fallen, and the whole world was ashamed.

We arose with the opening notes of the woodland anthem, whether into pink dawn, or soft summer rain. We touched a match to the fire laid upon the hearth, and prepared hastily a cereal and some coffee, both



made fit for the gods by the rich, yellow cream from our Alderney cow. After our simple meal, we waited for nothing. Together we wandered into wonderland, aimlessly, whither the spirit led us. The smell of the earth and of moss, the spiciness of young ferns whose prodigality our feet unwittingly crushed, the fainter sweetness of the gay azaleas, with the whole riot of the smaller undergrowths, all fresh and radiant, lifted us to dizzy heights of sublimity.

“Our violets alone are worth living for,” I said one morning, when we had passed through a marshy bit where they clustered densely in fragrant clumps, “with their variety of colour, and size, and delicate veining, and the surprises in odour, from the first May awakening to the large deep-lined blue beauties of early June.”

Roger interrupted me to wave his hand toward an old pasture bottom upon which we were just emerging. I gave a little cry,



and we both ran down into it, faintly blue with the fairy snow of bluets. As far as our wondering eyes could reach that tender colour stretched out before us. Behind us arose the rich morning song of that stranger bird, the hermit thrush.

“O my God,” I cried, clasping my hands reverently, “I am glad to be alive!”

Roger’s hat came off. After a brief silence, I said weakly: “Take me home. I can stand no more to-day.”

We turned about dumbly, and went back, I to my few household duties, and Roger to his writing. Later I took cushions and my sewing, and went out to sit on the great rock under the pine tree that guards our house. I always felt it was only fair that, while Roger was working, I should do something practical, and then I knew I should want some cool print gowns for July and August. I intended to make them very simple, but even so, those long seams



were as endless as if some malignant fairy stretched them as I sewed. With so much to distract the attention it was difficult to keep from losing my needle. If I raised my head to listen to an unfamiliar bird note, it was gone. If a bright splash of colour called me down the path only a very little way, azalea hunting, or if I stopped to climb up to maidenhair fern growing where I had never expected to find it, I came back to a missing needle and a seam not so nearly done by far as when I had left it. I concluded to try photography for my serious work.

That made a new interest for Roger, too. I took beautiful bits of our favourite spots, making up my compositions while my husband wrote. At night we fashioned a dark room out of one of the bedrooms, and developed the plates. It was another and a substantial joy. Every hour seemed more completely abandoned to happiness.



“We are, indeed, in a new world. It is Genesis,” I said once, after a glorious afternoon of bird study was followed by a moonlight walk up the Vosenkill. “‘The evening and the morning were the first day.’”

“Don’t,” said Roger. “The serpent entered so soon.”

He did not enter then, to us, but June did. Heavily fragrant wild grape blossoms hung from vine-draped trees and clambered over fallen stumps. Ferns grew more luxuriantly. The elderberry bushes were massed with their green-white prodigality; and the wild roses, waxen blossoms set in waxen foliage, were the chief glory of our more open spaces. And then — the wealth of laurel bloom was upon us.

A half-hour’s walk brought us to the foothills of the mountains, where this June splendour spread like a carpet before us in acres of rosy colour. We had, to be sure,

a more temperate display nearer home, but, for the floral carnival, we must make some exertion, which we were only too glad to do, every day while they were in their supremacy.

Once we went to them in the moonlight; a soft June night, flooded with tender romance. We wandered through the rough ways of the blooming acres, conscious only of the moon and the flowers, until soul-weariness dragged us down upon a great boulder, our feet among the laurel. A stem of the lovely flowers lay against my cheek. I gathered it with a sudden impulse, and turned to fasten it in my husband's button-hole. He looked down at me smiling. I thought how handsome he was in the moonlight. My hands trembled with the rapture of the maid Molly in the long ago, and I drew shyly away from him. He put out his arm as if to draw me to him, and then stopped, as if he, too, were afraid. We sat



in embarrassed silence until with an effort Roger wheeled toward me to lift my face to his.

Gazing steadily down into my eyes he whispered, "Mary, I love you."

"So do I," I whispered back. "I mean — you, Roger!"

Then he pressed me against his heart, for such a declaration of what I had been to him, and would be to him, as only my most secret soul can phrase.

"When I first loved you," he added, "I thought I understood what it meant. But that was only a young man's — a stranger's fancy. Now, dearest, it is a husband of seven years — your other self — that woos you." He paused as if his life's happiness depended upon my answer.

"And wins me, Roger," I said, looking up shyly, to be kissed.

CHAPTER IV

FOR the first weeks of that era of peace we had purposely cut ourselves off from postal communication with the outside world.

But there came a time when Roger must begin reading proof of the book he had in press; and so, one evil morning, he was obliged to slip a prosaic leaf into the poetic calendar of halcyon days of which we had enjoyed more than one month. He went to town — the town of trolley cars and Maurice, of bargain counters and the odours of yesterday's dinner. I felt so sorry for him when he set off, as conventionally dressed and as commonplace as a bank president, that I promised recklessly to be as miserable as I could while he was gone. "I dare you to be



*"WHERE ONE CATCHES FASCINATING GLIMPSES
OF THE VALLEY"*



miserable here," he called back, in wistful gaiety, as he hurried away, an absurd creature with money in his pockets.

Before he was barely out of sight it seemed foolish for me to be any more wretched than his absence made obligatory. So I took my camera up to what we call our observatory: the summit of a fern-covered cliff where one catches fascinating glimpses of the valley. Before I knew it I was composing alluring bits of pictorial peace, and singing like a lark. Suddenly I realised from the position of the sun that it must be noon. Roger had started away so early that it was almost time for him to return, and I had forgotten to be lonely. Guiltily I ran to the edge of the rocks to look down our avenue of trees. There the dear fellow was, winding his way through tangled undergrowths at an eager pace that smote my conscience.

"Who is that handsome stranger?" I sang out jauntily.



He lifted a radiant face of surprise to me. "The fairy prince, come for his beautiful bride," he called back.

He held out his arms, and I tried to run down into them, with a naiad's grace, but, someway, I slipped on the pine needles, and slid down to his feet, a dishevelled heap. He picked me up tenderly, hunting for a clean place on my face to kiss, I paying no heed to the anxious inquiries in my nervous dread of what he might have encountered.

"I am afraid you found letters, as well as proofs, Roger?" I began, with questioning inflection. "Tell me, are the Philistines at our heels?"

He slipped my hand through his arm, and we moved toward the house as he said with solemn gravity, that had very little of mockery in it:—

"The serpent has entered Paradise."

"O Roger," I cried tragically, "in what form?"



He shook his head. "Not one lithe, graceful tempter, coiling about our hearthstone, but, my dear girl, our innocent feet have stepped into a whole nest of adders. I will show you what I mean when we get to the house."

When we reached there my husband walked over to the table and laid a letter upon it.

"Oh, Mr. Lyman's writing," I said. "Is he coming here?"

Mr. Lyman was one of the camping coterie.

"Yes, my dear," Roger answered. "He seems to have a notion that we have some sort of spacious cottage." He proceeded to read: "I am just getting about after pneumonia. My physician has advised the Adirondacks, but I believe the Vosenkill would be more beneficial. I am wondering if you would oblige a sick old chap with a bed in your house, while his camp is being set up.



Of course my wife will come to look after me. Unless we hear to the contrary we will be with you next week on Tuesday."

"Poor fellow!" we said together; and then my soul shrieked audibly, "But Mr. Lyman's wife!"

Roger laid down another envelope. "Mr. Enderson?" I asked. "Is he coming, too?"

"Yes. Hearing of the Lymans', and our venture, he says he will set up camp with his wife and his brother here for the entire season, this year. They come on Monday."

"Ah," I whispered.

"I went to see Judge Elliott about buying the land below us. He thought he would not dispose of it after all. But, rather —" Roger's voice grew strained, "he should build there for himself." I groaned. "Reserve your lamentations till I finish the quotation, my dear," Roger said.

"What will he build?" I asked then.

My husband's teeth set. The words came

hard. They were these, "*A rustic cottage.*"

I clapped my hands to my ears, and staggered to a seat. Roger laughed sardonically. "Do you think, if I make some strong coffee to brace us, we can live until morning?" I inquired.

His answer was, "Maurice is coming the following week."

"We will make him milk the cow," was my hysterical exclamation of unsisterly vengeance.

Each answer of my husband's was worse than the last. He now spread out three plump envelopes before me. "For you," he murmured, still between set teeth. "All from migratory songsters, I presume."

One was from a young woman whom I had invited to Agawam, and to whom, when writing to explain why the invitation there must be cancelled, I had felt it only civil to tell something of our new plans. Her mis-



sive was a delicately worded hint to the effect that the wild woods seemed even more alluring to one of her tastes than Agawam. The other two were from commonplace acquaintances in the village to tell me that they, too, inspired by our successful experiment, were to begin at once rustic cottages similar to Judge Elliott's upon land purchased from him, the very ground we so much coveted.

"It is a hideous joke of some sort," I cried at length. "No one ever gets so many letters in one post."

"When they have had no mail for more than a month they do," Roger said with discouraging brutality, diving into another pocket, and pulling out a half-dozen or so more. "Don't be alarmed, Mary. These are all harmless business letters and circulars. There was a pile of papers and magazines that I could not bother to bring. As nearly as I can make out, that old fool means to encourage every one who will listen to



come here with him; the more the merrier principle."

"Which old fool?" I asked.

"The Judge," Roger answered, looking before him stolidly. "He is just ass enough to start a Park."

I gave a stage shriek. If I had known how those things are managed, I should have fainted.

CHAPTER V

WHEN we heard the voices of our approaching guests, and the banging of their luggage, Roger and I rushed out to greet them. "I wonder if I can remember the correct, hypocritical twang of the naughty world?" I had asked my Mentor.

"Act in reverse ratio to your feelings," he had adjured.

So I threw myself upon Mrs. Lyman's ample figure, aggressively modish in a new travelling toilette. She returned my clasp in that familiar scene I had always loathed. A great fat robin friend, on a bough above us, looked down in blank disgust. I disentangled myself as best I might; and Mrs. Lyman, with her eyes fixed on our home, asked, "Where is your house, dear?"

"If you are not careful you will fall over it," I laughed.

"Oh," she returned. "You are camping. I thought you were living here."

"We are living, in the truest sense," Roger said sententiously.

The reproof aroused Mrs. Lyman's extravagance. She is always what my husband calls gushing, and now that she had amends to make, she set our common-sense flesh to creeping. "Oh! Oh! Oh! how charming!" she cried, following us inside our house. "How sweetly simple! Tell the men where to put the luggage, George. What an expansive view! They would better unstrap them. No, not there. The little bag on top. Yes, an exquisite outlook. Unstrap the others, too." Then, looking toward me, "Shall I put my hat here, dear?"

We would gladly have given them the freedom of the place, but they preëmpted it, unbidden. 'An invalid is always personality

italicised, as we all know, and Mrs. Lyman herself was an entity in capital letters. The double presence seemed to fill our house to bursting at the seams. The sick man ensconced in the largest chair, with his medicines and appurtenances, the wife's fashionable litter, the necessary luggage, were so many blotches upon the serenity of our home.

In such times of domestic strain the overwrought mind usually finds some triviality to settle upon as a grievance. It seemed to me then that Mrs. Lyman's smart hat found a dozen new resting-places for itself in as many minutes. I sought no spot that it was not already at home there. When I had gone to the spring-house for cream, I looked up suddenly, from a bending posture, to see Roger standing over me.

His first words were, "I would feed that hat to the cow if I thought she would eat it."



“Thank you, Roger,” I answered. “I shall not mind so much, now I know half the burden of those bows is on your soul. I thought mine bore it all.”

The spring-house was an excavation we had made near the larger house, in a mound above a flow of deliciously cold water, in which to keep our few perishable stores. Roger took the pitcher of cream from me, and we walked back under the majestic trees to the clutter and the garrulity our guests had brought.

After the simple meal, of which the Lyman's ate voraciously, we broached the subject of, not our usual long evening tramp, but a short ramble. They were politely aghast at the notion. Mr. Lyman was not strong enough, Mrs. Lyman was too tired from travelling — that lusty woman who shook our house with the strength of her deep chest tones. So we made talk to them, punctuated by their smothered yawns, and we watched

Mrs. Lyman carry her hat into her bedroom.

She was to occupy my quarters with me. I know she broke none even of the minor laws of the most approved ethical code. But her large figure, with its multitudinous trappings, and her intemperate vocabulary, seemed to crowd me out of my very bed. I lifted into the upper berth my attenuated figure that felt as if it were shrinking as fast as Alice when she drank of the bottle on the little glass table. Mrs. Lyman spread herself out in the lower bunk broadly, and proceeded to refresh her rich vital existence. I cannot accuse her of anything so vulgar as snoring, but she was soon very much asleep in her elaborate nightgown.

It was too dark a night for me distinctly to see the disorder her finery had wrought in my spotless room, but I was so conscious of it all, and of her personality beneath me, that I was stifled. I thought the feeling would



pass, but it did not. With increased longing the thought of out-of-doors lured me. I struggled with the temptation long and valiantly, then, just at the point where Lymanism seemed to have smothered my consciousness, I was briefly resuscitated by a soft swishing sound. It was my guest's hat falling from its hook behind the curtains. That trifle decided me.

I swung myself guiltily down from my perch over her somnolent body, stealthily I threw on a few garments, and, for fear of arousing some member of the household by the creaking of a door, I climbed softly out of the open window. It was a long, laborious process, for one not used to housebreaking. But once my feet touched the soft earth, they seemed winged.

Oh, the ecstacy of that initial moment of freedom. It is comparable to nothing but the first kiss of love, though that, too, is puerile when this thought lies next it. Every star



in the black vault above gave me a distinct benediction. It was quite still, except for the furtive movement now and then of some soft-footed creature of the night, and the gay tinkle of the Vosenkill. There was no moon, and despite the stars it was very dark under the trees and the tall shrubbery. But healing abounded. That potent touch wiped from my soul the scars of Mrs. Lyman's bouffant petticoats and her squirming wire bustle.

My beating pulses led me on, on whither I knew not, and neither did I care. We were merely plunging into space, my hot temples and I, until the first impatience was cooled, and then I began to move more slowly; almost like floating, it seemed, it was so entirely without conscious volition, until a long-time dawning terror burst positively upon me. I had been hearing behind me footsteps which I, at first, set down to some forest friend. I knew no evil creature lurked

there, and the regularly occurring pitapat had lessened my sense of isolation before it had come near enough to seem heavy and human. I began to realise that I was a long distance from my home when I turned toward a more open space among the dog-woods and hurried away from the Vosenkill.

The footsteps turned too, stumbling, as I had done, over one spot of tangled undergrowth. Definite fear smote me suddenly. I had never known it there before. We were altogether too remote for tramp progresses; the red man is not of the east, nor have I faith in ghosts. Still It was gaining upon me. Rapidly, with steady paces, something was coming toward me at midnight, in the black woods. I was a trembling, nursery child again, frozen in white horror to the spot where I stood. Unwise thoughts scudded through my brain of an escaped lunatic, a criminal fleeing from justice. In that place it must be something altogether unusual.



The awful eeriness of mystery touched the fact. I think I could have stood the certainty of any number of simple highwaymen — but this!

The footsteps veered a little to the right. I had time to slip off sideways, but I could not stir. There was no need to hold my breath. There was none to hold. Then my alert ears registered a more easterly course. But suddenly there was a dead stop. It turned and crept toward me with outstretched arms. I could begin to see an indistinct outline of what was unmistakably a man. He was feeling his way cautiously, for he had inadvertently stepped down into a matted thicket of bushes.

I might have moved off easily now on the other side of a great rock if my feet had not been dead. But I was far past lifting a member. I waited. It came on. Then one of the exploring hands struck against me. The man shrieked — not I. I waited. The



hand moved about wildly, aimlessly, before it could catch hold of me again. There was another exclamation — from the man. An eager touch ran over my person.

A match was struck. By the instant flash we looked into each other's faces — Roger and I.

“Why, Mary,” he cried. “What are you doing?”

“Nothing,” I wailed, falling against him limply. “The house was so full of those people I could not bear it.”

“Nor I!” he returned fervently.

We exchanged our motives, which were identical, for actions which were identical, except that one had been pursuer and the other pursued.

Then we sat down on a neighbouring rock, and talked over our position, which at that hour seemed quite desperate.

“There is not room in the house,” I sighed, “for us and Mrs. Lyman's hat.”



“I know it,” he said. “But what can we do? I do not want to kill Lyman. He is too weak.”

“Don’t make grim jokes,” I groaned. “I am very serious.”

Roger laid his hand on mine. “It is serious,” he said. “I have been thinking, Molly, would it be too pointed if we camped for the rest of their stay, in the cow-shed?”

I could only shake my head.

CHAPTER VI

THE Lymans remained with us for nearly a week, so complicated were their plans for camp building. First and last, a score of workmen must have been necessary to their arrangements. There were numerous delays in the arrival of the various helps to comfort. We seemed to do nothing during those days but to walk back and forth from our home to their camping ground, to watch the lack of progress.

A large waterproof tent with a solid wood floor was set up for general purposes, a smaller one for sleeping, and a remote shanty built for cooking. Huge boxes filled with ranges, oil- and alcohol- and charcoal-, elaborately furnished cots, wicker chairs, rugs,



crockery, bath tubs, canned edibles, sacks of coffee, chests of tea, chafing dishes, arrived daily.

Then the Endersons came with equal intricacies, and, while our senses were still buzzing from all this hurly-burly, hammers began upon the rustic cottages of the Elliott settlement. Henceforth eager solicitations called us in an opposite direction.

What had we done to fate to deserve all this? Before our eyes "cabins" arose, fashioned of pine logs with the bark left on, encircled by piazzas balustraded with laced boughs. And we were made to enter these evil things, to confront rustic grills and gnarled knots that we were told resembled buffalo heads, and decorative effects in which figured the grey squirrels whose little lives we valued, stuffed to bursting in their dead stiffness, and similar owls, with now and then a deer's head or antlers to lend a supposed touch of nature to a spot where no deer are



to be found. When the coloured posters, and the birch-bark ornaments, the Japanese lanterns, pine cone and rope tassel touches were added, we should have smitten our breasts if we had had spirit left.

Then people to match the houses came to the settlement, and down in the Lyman's camp a sister, more garrulous, more gushing, than the lady already established there.

One of the mysteries of my day and generation is the modern young girl. I find her in two distinct types: the athletic, self-reliant, unsentimental college graduate, and the advanced kindergarten species, romantic, soft, ingenuously timid. Mrs. Lyman's sister belonged to this latter family.

This was perhaps not an auspicious moment for Maurice to choose for his visit to us. But it is the one he did select. I do not want, however, to think that outside conditions had anything to do with the situation, nor the fact that we had some old



scores to settle. It was perhaps merely that we were in our element, now. Suffice it to say, he came to us one lovely summer evening, looking and appearing almost as foreign as the Lymans had done.

An epitome of our position lay in Roger's remark, "If we had not had this recent intercourse with the cottagers, I think I should have to talk to Maurice upon my fingers."

"He would not have come, if he had dreamed it was all so primitive," I laughed. "Did you notice that, after one wearing, the duck trousers went back, like a bear when he sees his shadow?"

Roger looked reflective. "We dress decently, do we not, Mary? I thought so, but why do these outsiders look so different?"

We both wore plain, convenient, well-made pedestrian suits, but they were those of all time, and had nothing to do with any late mode which, after only a few months' isola-

tion, looked as oddly to us as if we were prehistoric creatures.

If our life was written in a foreign tongue for Maurice, I will say this for him that he tried desperately to translate it. It was almost pathetic to note the earnest way in which he watched Roger, and his boyish imitation of whatever he could master.

When he had been with us two days — but first I must explain that Judge Elliott had just left me after gaining my advice upon the finishing of the side walls in his cottage's chief room, "Should he use Japanese matting or denim?" And I had stained my soul with the suggestion of crimson burlaps. When he had gone away, I said to Maurice: —

"Will you take this pail and milk for us? Roger is hoeing beans."

There are single moments that make rich amends for years of suffering. This youth had coldly criticised me in the past.



“I beg your pardon, Mary?”

“That pail — take it, please, and do the milking,” I answered as lightly as if asking him to bring me a chair.

“I don’t think I quite understand you,” he hesitated.

I repeated my request. There was a long pause. Then:—

“I can’t, Mary,” in low tones of desperation. “I do not know how.”

But I was fetching my hat. “I can quickly show you,” I persisted.

He dumbly followed me out into the foot-path, the pail grasped lightly. It was outrageous desecration. I felt as guilty as if I had thrust a coal-scuttle into the hand of the Apollo Belvedere. But I tripped along by his side with an appearance of gay unconsciousness.

When we reached the stable Maurice quickly set down the pail, and I as quickly brought him the little stool.



“What is this for?” he asked, allowing it to hang heavily in his hand.

“For you to sit on,” I answered.

“Sit on?” he said. “Sit where?”

“By the cow,” I returned.

He brought to bear upon me eyes of stern reproof. “*Mary, why should I sit by a cow?*”

“My dear boy,” I expostulated, “how else could you milk?”

I saw Daisy had not come up from the pasture yet, but I was not ready to let him off. So we stood looking polite defiance at each other until Roger’s cheerful whistle broke in upon us.

“Why,” he cried, “what are you doing here?” as he made way for Daisy to pass in.

“Maurice has come to milk for you, dear,” I answered demurely.

He grasped the situation instantly. “Good!” he exclaimed; “you are working into the life admirably. It is a pleasure to



find you so adaptable." Then something in the wretched fellow's face — he was such a boy, after all — must have smote my husband's kindly heart, for he added: "But I cannot be cheated of this pleasure, even by my brother, and a guest. You can watch me milk, though, if you want to, Maurice."

"Very well," that young man said weakly.

"Did you ever see such satin sides?"

Roger went on, seating himself with easy grace on the little stool. The streams of white milk playing from his finely modelled hands are a charming sight, but Maurice was staring about the shed as if that were the last place to find satin.

"Where are you looking?" Roger laughed. "I mean the cow's back."

Maurice glanced in that direction. "Oh, the cow," he said, drawing away ever so little.

"Remove that princely scion of a royal house," Roger burlesqued.

"Come, Maurice," I interposed, in pal-



liation. "I want to show you the sunset from the observatory."

He gave me his arm with alacrity, and we bounded northward.

I do not think Maurice cares much for any phase of nature, and we had not more than established ourselves upon the hardly reached elevation when his restless eyes looked off down the evergreen avenue rapturously. "Look," he cried; "what a lovely girl! Who is she?"

Mrs. Lyman and her sister were sauntering into our range of vision. The feminine relatives of good-looking, eligible young fellows always think, despite denials, that they have but to pick and choose among woman-kind. This was Maurice's moment of speedy revenge for the milking episode, if he had but known it. I looked with painful foreboding from his handsome, flushed face down upon the lackadaisical figure of Agnes Birdsell.

She was the conventional poetic, rustic maiden, in white muslin and blue ribbons. In her hand she held a nosegay of blossoms, just beginning to close. The first words I heard her say were: "I did not know, sister, that these dear little flowers went to sleep at night with the birds."

A privilege of our condition was the ease with which one could be not at home to unwelcome visitors. Given a back door and acres of dense woodland, what need of a prevaricating servant?

However, I realised now that Maurice was very much at home. He assisted me with perilous haste in our descent from the observatory. Mrs. Lyman and Miss Birdsell fluttered forward to meet us, or me, rather. They acted as much surprised at seeing Maurice as if they had not been told the exact hour when he was expected.

Mrs. Lyman and I fell into step, the young people following us. My companion



asked me in her lowest chest tones, if I did not think Agnes looked like a moonbeam in her white drapery. "Very much," I answered with beating heart. The fib startled me, I had grown so used to honesty in those few weeks.

Agnes was asking Maurice if he did not like the poetical life of the woods, and he was answering as I had done, and with equal truth, "Very much."

Then she told him of a little bird with a broken leg she had found that day, and of how she was tending it. Her voice was tremulous, her gestures tragic. "Which do you love best, birds or squirrels?" she asked.

Maurice had no notion. He had "never thought upon the subject."

"Stop and consider," she cooed with honeyed imperativeness. "The gay, chattering squirrels amuse us with their antics, to be sure, when we see them. But it is



the songsters that cheer from far and near. Who would give for all the squirrels one of our dear sweet-voiced nightingales?"

Maurice believed, on the whole, he did care most for birds. I longed to expose her about the nightingales, but I was saying to myself that the remark would do its own restorative work. Maurice must be safe. Then that pretty girl slipped on a patch of dead leaves, and would have fallen had not my brother caught her. We older ones turned at the liquid cry of alarm upon a tableau of youthful loveliness. "Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful," anxiety chanted in my ears.

Miss Birdsell's usual boast of sure-footedness was void, that evening, for she slipped again before we reached the house.

I cannot say that I saw Roger's retreating figure, or even its shadow, but there was some sort of stir that told me he had guessed our approach, and was escaping. Maurice

brought easy-chairs and a pile of cushions, and we made ourselves comfortable on the boulder before our house that Mrs. Lyman prefers to call our piazza. And then we talked, or, rather, our guests talked of art: books and music and pictures. May the god of genius, in remembrance of my sufferings, forgive the black falsehoods I told in polite acquiescence! It is strange that weak conventionality should like so well to ape individuality, but the rôles of these two were strongly reminiscent of other and unhappier days.

“I suppose my taste is rather odd,” Mrs. Lyman reiterated, while she commended all the novels that had sold in hundreds of thousands, and the poetic crazes of the last decade — Kipling’s “Recessional” and “The Man with the Hoe.”

“I love all the works of Omar Khayyam,” Agnes threw in for good measure. I glanced involuntarily at Maurice, but he reads little



except medical literature. He was smiling approval of the graceful figure leaning back against the old pine in a charming attitude. It fairly made my teeth chatter to see her so bewitching. I had a wild feeling as if I should take my brother by the hand and plunge off with him into the forest, not to return until the last remnant of insidious temptation was gone.

Presently Mrs. Lyman said, "Well, little moonbeam, we shall be afraid of those dark woods if we linger too long."

Whereat Maurice adjured them to forget that such things were; he should enjoy nothing so much as the walk to their camp on that lovely evening. Our guests settled back, with that air of finality some women have, that mocked me with utter hopelessness.

Here Agnes turned to me suddenly with ravishing earnestness to ask: "Which do you care for most, Plato or Petrarch?"



I stared aghast for a moment before I murmured desperately, "They are so very different!"

She smiled indulgently, and so did Maurice, as if, as he would phrase it, she had me.

Roger saved the situation. He emerged just then, all surprise and satisfaction, but the dear fellow was so out of practice that it was not ten minutes before he showed that he had known of the arrival. I was startled. However, such women see nothing but compliments. Mrs. Lyman said to him with accented intensity: "I want to thank you for sending those delicious squabs to Mr. Lyman." When he disclaimed the favour, she insisted, "Oh, I don't mean the birds. It was the affection that I value. I have always felt that there was a peculiarly strong bond between you two."

Roger winced. There could hardly be a less congenial pair than himself and George



Lyman. He did not know what to say, apparently, but nothing was necessary. Mrs. Lyman kept up the incessant refrain. "It was so very sweet of you; so very sweet!"

It is darkest before dawn. After this our guests bade us good-bye. Roger thought Maurice could hardly find his way back from our neighbours' camp at night, so we joined the party of escort.

Naturally the young people started off together, Agnes at a coy distance from Maurice, except in the very frequent intervals of dangerous walking. Then with what sweet appealing timidity she clung to his hand or his arm. I felt grim and worldly-wise, stalking along, trying to give cordial acquiescence to Mrs. Lyman's prattle. When we reached the camp, Mr. Lyman on one side, Mrs. Lyman on the other, squeezed my poor husband in a vise of gratitude. Agnes slipped into the tent and ostentatiously

nursed her wounded bird in the glare of a great lantern. She did make a lovely picture of the sentimental type, one which Maurice and I, standing a little apart, watched with quite different emotions.

“Look there, Mary,” he said with boyish ardour; “did you ever see a more exquisite tableau?”

He lingered drinking in the scene to the very last moment, not even noticing Roger hurrying breathlessly toward us. My poor husband looked old and battered. “What is it, dear?” I asked.

“Those blasted squabs,” he groaned.

CHAPTER VII

OF course Miss Birdsell left something for Maurice to return to her. It was a fan, and our brother proposed transporting it to its owner early the next morning after the visit.

“There is no haste,” I urged weakly, in full consciousness of the futility of protest. “She probably has dozens of them down there. They have everything in that camp.”

“Electric fans, I imagine,” Roger added.

But Maurice was quite determined. If Miss Birdsell had been somewhat plainer, I should have set his obduracy down to the account of an idle young man craving variety. As it was, each glance at his watch magnified my foreboding. We breakfast so



early that he was obliged to restrain his impatience for some time, which he spent pacing about out-of-doors, smoking. Whenever I looked out to see if he had gone, he had his watch in his hand. I only did so twice, but I naturally supposed that I had not intercepted every glance at that hateful timepiece.

When he really started away I asked of my husband: "Do you think he will marry her? Or, it is foolish to phrase it in that form — he will marry her."

"My wife used always to bid me say, Will she marry him? in speaking of other people's brothers," Roger answered.

I patted his dear bronzed cheek. "But who wouldn't marry Maurice?" I said, "unless she were the wife of Roger."

My husband took the hand that caressed him into his strong clasp. "He is good-looking, and he is an infant phenomenon in his profession. I fear — I fear, Molly, darling! The boy is certainly done for."



“Oh, yes,” I said. “He stated this morning that there is not a flaw in her beauty, which is unfortunately true. By to-morrow he will not be able to speak of her so definitely.”

“Don’t I know the ambiguity of that second stage?” Roger laughed. “But she is a sweet, pretty girl. It might be much worse.”

“Folly is the very worst fault,” I persisted, “of her sort — sentimental mawkishness.”

“But think what a child she is. She may outgrow all that.”

I shook my head. “If she were not Mrs. Lyman’s sister. But it is in the blood. No. We must make up our minds to living in a cold perspiration for the rest of our days.”

He called me pessimistic. Still, I noticed that he was too disturbed to settle down to his writing. At such moments he goes out to work in the garden. I took a basket, and,



putting on a large shade hat, followed him. My destination was the patch of peas, and my intention to pick some of them for luncheon.

As I passed Roger, weeding the beet bed, I stopped to exclaim, "Dear, golden-hearted fellow! What strong, muscular arms, and yet how perfectly modelled! A very god among men."

He jumped up and caught me in his arms. "Oh, you malicious woman," he cried, "to imitate your neighbours!"

"You malicious man," I returned, "to see an imitation. Where are the quotation marks, pray?"

He looked at me gravely for a moment. "It is better than if she wanted to vote, isn't it, Molly?"

"It is not better than if she wanted to do anything," I returned, walking away. "And that is rather comprehensive, too."

Picking peas somewhat restored my men-



tal balance. I love to feel the cool pods in my hands, and to watch the fresh green of the growing pile. With every handful of smooth plumpness there arose in me a delightful sense of ownership. We had planted and tended, and now I was gathering these graceful, hanging bits of God's bounty.

I liked almost as much to shell them, sitting under the pine tree. It is a simple joy to dive into the long pods for the tiny toothsome green balls. The odour is delicious, too, when they are cooking, just before the rich cream is thrown over them. We were to enjoy them on this day with fricasseed chicken. A frugal meal though it was in variety, it was epicurean in quality, and still that brother-in-law did not return for it. I waited until there was danger of overcooking, and then I went to call Roger.

When he is near enough for the voice to carry, I say from the door of our home,



Roger standing, hat in hand: “ ‘ The earth is God’s, and the fulness thereof.’ ”

It is our only grace before meat, and it is very impressive.

But what does it matter that the feast is fit for the gods, when one’s eyes are upon the clock? Every pea I ate seemed like an egg in my throat, and, after we had quite finished the meal, there was still no Maurice.

I took a book to our favourite rock that afternoon, but it was not to read. Roger, who had protested that he must write for three hours and a half, come what would, slipped out to me in ten minutes to ask if I thought anything could have happened to Maurice.

“ Yes,” I said sadly, “ but he does not care for your aid.”

Every half-hour after that he appeared, with like inquiries, until Maurice’s whistle was heard in the distance. The tune was a sentimental melody that was an old favourite of his, but to-day it sounded like a knell in



my ears. Roger, someway, got into the house and was busily writing when his brother arrived. But I was not so bored as I had expected. Perhaps I was a little disappointed. At any rate Maurice had only come home to dress. He was invited, with the Lyman contingent, to the Endersons' camp for tea.

When he had gone again I went in to Roger, little as he deserved information. "See here," I said, laying on the desk before him a pencil sketch of the lower Vosenkill, so out of drawing as to make him scream out, as if I had inflicted a blow. "Maurice wants me to preserve it very carefully for him," I explained.

"Who did it?" Roger asked.

"Is there more than one person who would gravely execute that, and afterward present it to a young man with two sound eyes in his head?"

"You are too severe, Molly," my hus-



band returned. "Maurice must have done it himself — in jest."

"Roger," I declaimed, "this is the first time I have ever felt like getting a divorce. But then you did not see the nauseating expression of his face. So clasp me to your bosom, as if the fat hills and the lean creek were not."

"Did he — did he — was he garrulous?" Roger asked.

I shook my head. "Another evil milestone is passed. The ambiguous point is reached. He told me the sketch 'was given to him.'"

Roger groaned.

CHAPTER VIII

ON the very night of Maurice's meeting with Miss Birdsell, I had despatched an urgent note of invitation to Margaret Robertson. What more effectual antidote could possibly be thought of than her gay cleverness? I waited, and so did Roger, in feverish impatience, for her reply.

In the meantime our neighbours again visited us, and Miss Birdsell left a gossamer handkerchief behind her. I was the finder of this hostage of fortune, and I wantonly turned it into a hostage to misfortune, sending Roger home with it the next day. However, no shrewdness can outwit that type of our fellow-man. My husband's report was that Mrs. Lyman had called her sister "a

careless little thing," then she boldly told him to ask Maurice to join them that evening at whist.

"Whist at the Vosenkill! Poker in Paradise!" I sneered. It was my only revenge. But what did it avail, except to make me feel ashamed, while the Lymans captured Maurice?

As speedily as an answer could arrive from Miss Robertson, one did so. The farmer's son, who was to bring in our mail to us, once a day, through the remainder of the proof-reading season, handed me a note in her strong, firm chirography, just as we were sitting down to our supper. I read the message aloud. After I had finished it, Roger exclaimed, with his eyes on Maurice:—

"Coming to-morrow? How opportune! She will be here to help us wash the floor."

There was a little pause. I was putting the letter back into its envelope. Maurice was staring at his brother. Presently he



broke into a gay peal of boyish laughter. "What do you suppose I thought you said, Roger? That Miss Robertson could help you wash the floor."

"I did," Roger answered.

The two men looked into each other's faces for a long minute silently. Then Maurice, very red, whispered, "Oh!"

"My dear brother," I interposed, "Roger has just come to that state of grace when he can scrub without cringing. He used to trample down his pride, before every attempt, with the spirited account in 'Walden' of the floor-scouring. He read it over and over, as if it were a recipe for humility. Then he would shake his head and say, 'Thoreau could do it. But we are not great enough to make it anything but squalid.'"

"You have an excellent memory for details, Mary," my victim answered. "I remember nothing of all that, except the reading of Thoreau, which is not strange,



either, as his collective work is the handbook of our lives." Then he laughed good-naturedly. "That began to sound rather like a platform speech. We do it athletically, finely, Maurice. We don't sozzle about."

Our brother looked unconvinced, and I broke in with: "We have on thick boots, and short skirts — or I do, and Roger wears his usual knickerbockers, so there is nothing to drag in the wet. We throw pail after pail of clear sparkling water from the Vosenkill over the floor, and each takes a broom, and, with fine, long strokes, like rowing a racing shell, we scour it to a beautiful whiteness. It is gloriously healthful, chest-expanding exercise. You can't think into what a glow it puts one. Then we go off on a long tramp while it dries."

"And when we come back to it, we have," Roger went on, "the sweetest, cleanest, most wholesome abiding-place poet can dream of."

"Oh," Maurice said again.



I took pity on his pride. "But Miss Robertson is not to be initiated so strenuously," I announced. "We will do all that in the cool of dawn. She does not arrive until nearly night."

Maurice gave me his bewitching smile, which said all the gratitude for which he had no words.

That angel-youth was astir with the first hint of light the next morning, to lend a helping patrician hand. At first he stood about awkwardly, and then, either because he was tired of being stepped upon, or because he had caught the infection of our enthusiasm, he suddenly took command of the situation. It was a cup-race indeed, and Maurice stroke oarsman. Above the long swish, swishing sweeps of his broom his voice rang out in eager commands to Roger and me, after each inundation of fresh water: "Now. All together. There. Once more. Good. Again. Once more. There!"



He was so excited that we thought we should not be able to check his mad dashes to the Vosenkill for more water. It was pretty to see him with the fresh carnation in his cheeks, and his eyes glowing. He is an Adonis, and I cannot wonder that he turns the heads of silly girls.

“I don’t think that corner over there at the right is quite so white as the rest,” he said, eyeing the result critically. Roger held him back when he would make at the mooted point with a new spurt of energy.

“It is the most immaculate of the lot. I am off now. Follow your leader.”

We did. After a light luncheon we walked through the glorious morning until we were ready for a more substantial meal, and the floor had had time to dry.

Roger is so peculiarly optimistic that he expected Maurice to become as much enamoured, upon closer acquaintance, with Miss Robertson as he had evidently been at first



sight with Miss Birdsell. When I would try to temper his credulity he always checkmated me with, "I should think that proved his susceptibility."

"Oh, yes," I finally answered, rather wearily. "I hope he'll propose to her before they get to the house. But I do not know that we ought to really expect it."

We had concluded, since some one ought to go down to the train to meet Miss Robertson, it might be serving our hopes to intrust this office to Maurice. He already knew her somewhat from an occasional brief meeting at Agawam. They would have the five-mile drive from the station to the edge of the woods together, and then the long walk in where the farmer's democrat wagon we engaged for such expeditions dare not venture its shaky old springs.

We sat outside our house watching for them, upon that soft, romantic, most auspicious evening. When I say we sat near our



house I always mean on the rock under the sentinel pine. Roger had built a seat against the tree to which we brought cushions of comfort at these times of waiting. That one spot deserves a whole lexicon of adulatory adjectives: wild, rugged, majestic, odorous, picturesque, peaceful.

The calm beneficence of the evening made us hopeful. Roger said for the fifty-first time, "Maurice is susceptible, isn't he?"

"I think he must be. Margaret Robertson is a very clever girl. She graduated with the highest honours her college could give."

"You don't mean pedantic, I hope. I always have considered her pretty."

"She is. Not so sickishly sweet as — some girls, but thoroughly *chic* and charming."

My husband encouraged me with his broadest smile of optimism. "I think Maurice is susceptible; don't you?" he said.

And then we saw them coming away off in the distance. They were a goodly pair in the



glimpses we could catch of them down the winding wood road between the trees and the spreading shrubs.

In the first distinct impression of Margaret's face she was thrown out against a background of dank green boughs. I was certainly justified in calling her lovely.

Roger was nearer than I as they approached us. There had been an exchange of waved greetings, but now we had come to that last moment tinged with the embarrassment of proximity that is not close enough for words.

The young people's voices, in low, earnest conversation, were growing at each instant more audible. The expression of our faces was, I am afraid, transparently strained and expectant. Then Roger made a little gesture of disgust.

"What is it?" I said, leaning toward him eagerly. "What are they talking about?"

"Cocaine," he answered fiercely.

CHAPTER IX

I DID not think the cocaine conversation quite so discouraging a matter as Roger did. Margaret had been reading a magazine article lately upon its effects, and she had questioned Maurice, as a physician, upon the verity of her information. She has many and wide interests, and nothing is more gratifying, surely, to any man than to have clever femininity learning at his knee. Incited by Margaret's eager questions, Maurice reeled off numerous scientific facts, clothed in diction that must have made him proud of himself. I wondered a little, before I began to realise that we were getting, in not disastrously condensed form either, all the papers he had read to medical societies.



For the first day or two I was exhilarated with hope. Roger was not. He said First Aid to the Injured might be a profitable work, but one could not reasonably expect it to end with a wedding. “‘Love has many and intricate ways,’” I quoted. “‘An undertaker marries as early as a poet.’”

“Perhaps so. Let me know, please, when broken hearts have displaced broken bones. I confess to discouragement.”

In truth, after the very first, I was rather whistling to keep my own courage from sagging. I do not believe, with Thackeray, that a woman may marry whomever she will, but I do think that the keynote of sentimentality is usually struck by the weaker hand. Margaret was cordial with Maurice, and even deferential in the direction in which she thought he knew best. But unfortunately there were too many other directions. I could see not a particle of difference in her manner with any of the three of us; friendly, inter-



"IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST ROMANTIC SPOTS."



ested, generous, she was to each alike. Polite indifference does not tie into love-knots.

I was not so much surprised as I was alarmed when I saw Maurice walking rapidly toward the Lymans' camp day after day. Margaret had a trick of arranging some plan, immediately after breakfast, that included merely herself and myself. Roger had his writing to occupy him, and our brother knew where a siren would look unutterable sweetness with eyes that Venus might have envied.

I think young men really bore a girl of Margaret's type. Unless there is some peculiar bond of ambition between them, she would rather not bother with their vagaries. But I was not to be balked by any modern notion. I planned a picnic for our family party.

A neighbouring stream, called Farrell Creek, was purple pink, just then, about the mouth with loosestrife. It is one of the wildest, most romantic spots, anyway, that nature



ever provided for her favourites' delight: banks lined with overhanging low-boughed trees, cool shadows for heated days, sunny midstream pools for cool ones, constant surprises in growths, here a reedy spot where tall cat-tails reared their sombre rockets, and there long, irregular outlines of loosestrife, the tender colour flung back against the deep green of birch trees and alder bushes. Already there were budding hints of the day when these banks should flame with the gorgeous cardinal-flower.

We kept a flat-bottomed rowboat in this idyllic spot for languid days when we liked to drift about there in the deep shadows, to read, or to write.

Here the scene of my proposed picnic was to be laid. Margaret reads aloud excellently—I do not mean with grimaces, but in a clear, sympathetic voice that, at times, thrills one. I selected a volume of Rossetti, for even the most practical professional man will



listen to "Sister Helen," and I meant to make her amuse Maurice, against their united wills though it might be. I had taken the bit between my teeth, as it were, and arranged the day's programme to suit myself.

We were to start soon after noon, that Roger might have the morning clear for work. We would have a walk of more than a mile to reach Farrell Creek. There we were to float about in the boat, to enjoy the loosestrife most and the other charms less. Margaret would read aloud, Roger and Maurice would fish until they were tired of drawing in empty hooks. We would land for our luncheon and to exhibit the mainland to Margaret. Then we would take a swim, and, after that, walk home in the cool of the afternoon, when we women, at any rate, would be ready for a good, long, soul-refreshing slumber.

Such was the original plan. But, alas, we were no longer independent beings. An



invitation to dinner — to dinner, forsooth! — from the Lymans for our whole coterie, displaced all anticipations of sleep. I thought the rest of the programme could proceed, and we go directly to our hosts from the creek, as their camp lay on our way, and save the long walk to our home and back again.

Margaret exclaimed: “But our dress, dear! Surely picnic attire would never do for dinner.”

I gave her that sage smile of one behind the scenes. “You have no idea of the primitive living here. If we take some fresh waists and collars, to put on when we come, all transformed, from our baths, nothing more could possibly be expected of us.”

“Is the early hour — six o’clock — a concession to the woods?” she asked, yielding a little her fear of the formal meal. “I might do your hair, and you mine, I suppose. Of course the mirror at the creek is like that in all bath-houses?”



“ Yes, I am afraid so. Do not be uneasy, though, about dress. Take my word for it, neatness is the one mode here.”

Roger had made, at Farrell Creek, two large bath-houses of boughs and awning-cloth, and it is there we go, nearly always, for our daily baths; there are so many exposed shallow places to catch and hold the sun, in cool spring days, and deep sheltered spots where hot rays never penetrate, for sultry hours, that it is ideal for the purpose.

I had no doubt of emerging directly from our bathing-suits into satisfactory toilets for a camp dinner. The fascinating spot soon cast the spell of its witchery over Margaret, too, and her scepticism faded with her complete submersion in the charms of the present.

As we glided along the edge of the pink mist Maurice reached out and gathered several long stems of loosestrife. With a graceful touch of gallantry that made my heart



seize hope to dance, he gave them to Margaret.

She was looking in abstracted transport along the winding course of bloom. Her eyes came back slowly to take note of the act. "Why did you give me these? To analyse?" she asked.

"To wear," said Maurice, rather red.

"Oh, thank you," she returned with more spirit. "They are very lovely. Would it be too girly, Mary, if I stuck them in my belt?"

"No, indeed," I said.

The bright flowers gave just the touch of youthful bloom to Margaret that she lacked. Later, when we were wandering along the creek-side together, I slipped my arm about her to whisper: "You ought always to wear posies, dear. They subdue the academic look."

"Do I look academic?" she asked, a cunning pucker between her eyes. "I would



wear a blue sash and a rose in my hair, if I thought that."

"Oh, no," I laughed. "It is not quite so bad; every woman student must be granted a few years to get the erudition rustle out of her petticoats. I should not be sorry, though, if you should begin collecting friendship bangles, and a very few actors' portraits."

"I suppose I might do that," she said meekly, though her expression was still intolerant and making clearly for Greek verbs.

"Those little girlish things erase the hallmark of college honours," I went on.

She lifted her eyebrows. "Is it so dire a disgrace to be graduated well?"

"By no means. But it is one of those triumphs that must be kept under, like precocious children, for fear of spoiling."

"I know," she said. "You mean my quoting that Greek oration yesterday."

"Yes," I answered, "and the Latin epi-



grams the day before; and again this morning."

"O dear," she sighed. "I must be a goose."

"Not if you think so," I exclaimed hopefully. "We are only geese when we think we are swans."

Margaret pressed my arm affectionately, and we moved apart, she, poor girl, to try to be untrue to her nature, and I to regret my advice.

A ghastly little drama followed. We spread our luncheon in a rocky fastness among a savoury clump of evergreens. I had never before realised of what a fine quality was my friend's youthful dignity until now, when I saw her distinctly frisky. Her body, no more than her spirit, could lend itself, in its tall, strong, well-knit members, to coquetry. I know it was altogether unconscious, but she threw herself into the rôle of a burlesque imitation of Miss Birdsell.



The childish, excited movements, the incessant chatter and laughter, moved me to uneasiness, and when she accepted some inane jest with Maurice by a swift, languishing look, she and I exchanged startled glances. We both blushed hotly. Then Margaret shrank behind a lichen-hung rock, as if she had been struck back by fate. When her dauntless spirit emerged, a few moments later, there was no more acting. And I was glad.

Very soon Margaret and Maurice had their heads together over an ant-hill, busily discussing the marvellous acuteness of red ants.

“ ‘ Let each man step to the music which he hears,’ ” I said to the disappointment in Roger’s eyes.

“ Yes, yes, I know,” he smiled. And then, significantly: “ We can’t change Margaret. We must try to make Maurice appreciate her.”

The young people were calling out their



remarks in strong, clear tones; we older ones subduing ours to the sentimental pitch, which, alas, is also that of slyness. But match-makers cannot demand gracious phraseology for their deeds. Sly we were, and sly we shall be called.

We spent the ante-bath hour, after luncheon, in furtive visits to the nests of feathered friends. This interesting investigation that I cannot forego is always tinged with sadness, so many are the foes of bird-life. A few patient mothers were still at home, some of them more wary even than usual, as domestic happiness had already been postponed many times by dire mischance. We stole cautiously up to the sapling from which had hung, a few days before, the finished birch bark nest of a red-eyed vireo where fledgelings had clanked their empty beaks at us until we saw the mother returning from market, and hastily withdrew our indelicate stare from the family board.



I stood upon tiptoe now to reach my gaze up to the dainty nest, Roger holding the branches back for me. "Oh!" I wailed. Roger knew. He always knows.

"Come away, dear," he said. We turned heavily. On the low limb of a convenient oak a sleek owl blinked her hateful eyes at us as we hurried past. On the ground about were strewn the tell-tale pellets of compressed feathers that we tried not to see.

When we came to the spot where a robin's humble home had been in a maple on the bank above Sylvester's Pool I was afraid to look. Roger's eyes said, "Shall I go first?" I nodded my head. Then I waited. Men are slow at caution. Minutes beat about me, with batlike wings. I waited, and still I waited. Then a cheerful voice rang out, "Six bells, and all is well."

I rushed headlong up the little knoll where my husband stood looking down at a fluttering family. His voice had startled them into



nervous tremor. Our sympathy could but turn away.

“Dear, patient sufferers,” I sighed, “monotonously cheerful when only one is gone.”

Roger started. “Why, yes!” he exclaimed. “There were three.”

I drew my hand through his arm. “And we must dine with the Lymans as if nothing had happened,” I said.

CHAPTER X

It took many submersions in the crystal-clear depths of Farrell Creek to subdue the fever in my heart. I had always thought my bathing-suit made cork of my spirits, and floated them with my body as carelessly as a water-lily. But my left side was hopelessly heavy, until I became engrossed in the task we all undertook of teaching Margaret to swim. She had learned to take a few strokes in sustaining salt water, but she stood, trembling and transfixed, at the amazing nature of our fresh-water feats.

The vanity that comes to the surface in us all at times arose now in me, not a rich cream of endeavour, but a miserable scum of baser qualities. I tried distinctly to show off. I dove from the overhanging boulders,



splashing down into Margaret's screams. I swam under water, I floated, I made long distance records, I rescued imaginary victims in the form of arrested *débris*. My exhibition moved buoyantly to the sweet music of my friend's surprise. Suddenly I realised that I was winning all the applause, while my poor husband was left to assist our guest. I swam hastily up to them to make what belated amends I could by taking Margaret's lessons into my own hands, but a consciousness of selfishness was not an auspicious preparation for what lay before us.

I was dissatisfied with myself, and, when we hurried into our fresh waists and neat walking skirts, it was difficult to be patient with Margaret's evident disapproval of her appearance. Clothes seemed so paltry. If there were no tragedy upon my heart, and no thoughtlessness upon my conscience, I should have been willing to go barefoot — or, at least, I thought so.

Margaret further exasperated me by asking if we were not starting too early for a six o'clock dinner. "My dear," I said, with studied gentleness, "compliments are measured here by the eagerness to arrive. We do not even know where the tree of knowledge grows."

"Pardon my persistency, Mary, won't you?" she smiled; "I am so green in Paradise."

Then she launched an animated conversation with Roger that brought them in step and thrust Maurice upon me for escort. That sort of girl always begins a long story with the wrong man at the exact moment of pairing off. I tried not to make Maurice responsible, as a young woman would, though it was hard to listen to his animated discussion of the opinions of "a friend of his," feeling so sure, as I did, who the friend was, and that there was an unconscious re-dressing of the statements for which he



seemed to be giving Agnes Birdsell full credit.

If we all have, as has been said, a subject upon which we are monomaniacs, mine is perhaps woodland vandalism. I have no tolerance to spare for the itching fingers that tear flourishing ferns from their natural environment to moult in tame dooryards; which cannot touch wild nature anywhere, in fact, without breaking, or bruising, despoiling its home, and polluting their own with stale odours of fresh fields.

The Lymans' camp was flanked by drooping, transplanted growths that always stirred my blood to wrath as I approached it. This day the instinctive rush of feeling was intensified by an indefinable, incongruous atmosphere of festivity about the place. For some reason a Japanese gong had seemed to the head of the house an appropriate instrument for arriving guests to use for their warning note. Roger struck it with



rather unnecessary fierceness, and a waiting-maid appeared in full uniform. If a liveried footman had emerged suddenly from the shades to wait upon Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday, I do not believe Defoe could have been more startled than we were now. I am afraid we gaped at this ghost of civilisation, Roger and I, in our robust innocence, remembering as I do my brother's high colour as we were ushered in. The right-hand corner of the main tent was partitioned off with muffling drapery into a be-cushioned apartment where our united eyes fell upon a clock that indelicately registered half-past five, as our ears were becoming acquainted with muttered excuses from the vanishing maid and hints of the ladies' speedy presence.

In that hour I learned what a generous woman, what a fine-grained lady, Margaret Robertson is. There was not one reproachful glance, not the most fleeting change of



colour. She was the same confident, graceful girl I had always found her, apparently unaware now of the shirt waist that seared my remorse as if each of its tiny stripes were so many hot irons torturing my consciousness. Our experiment had already done this much for me that I had no regret for myself, or for my husband, because of my blundering misreading of the invitation. But I was truly sorry to have submitted our guests to embarrassment.

Presently Mr. Lyman came in, red and breathless. And, in a few minutes more, the ladies appeared in diaphanous gowns of pale shades and lace-trimmed ruffles that lifted, for the first moment, eyes grown unaccustomed to a transport of admiration. The elder sister wore a delicate green dimity, while Agnes was transcendently lovely in a dainty pink lawn with fluttering ribbons, bewitching bows, and graceful falls of lace. The taste was negative, but the beauty was



positive. Margaret looked to me suddenly as if she might have had on a dozen shirt waists, one above another, so conspicuous had contrast made her costume. But no one could have been less awkward under the trial. She was no more conscious than a disembodied spirit, and if Maurice had not watched us so narrowly I might have thought less of ourselves and more of the great jars of ferns everywhere about us; there were as ruthless displays of maidenhair as if it were a common garden weed. My imagination would strike inflexibly against the bare brown spots from which all this wealth of savoury green had been uprooted, but I could not be half angry enough to satisfy discontent, my brother's furtive glances kept me so disturbed for Margaret.

Finally the Enderson neighbours arrived, the lady of the party festive in pale blue muslin, and the male contingent too in half-formal finery. These women must all have



argued from a premise that the inexpensive-ness of their gowns made them appropriate, and the men had, of course, been merely told what course to pursue.

Dinner was served by the trim maid we had already seen, and by Mr. Lyman's general utility man, who, I suppose, must also have been the cook. No one could say that, no matter how many offices he had had to perform, he did not fully appreciate the dignity of this one. When he reappeared for each course he had added some new touch of pomp to his toilet. The seersucker coat of the canned soup era had evolved into dress tails by the canned plum pudding stage. There was no necktie when the canned salmon abused our nostrils, but, by the time we were pretending to eat potted quail, a snowy band encircled his proud throat. I was sorry when dinner was over, for I was really curious to see how many more clothes Herrickson had back in those mysterious re-

gions where only culinary products are supposed to flourish, and to produce their own kind.

My emancipated stomach recoiled from the tinned stuffs, and I longed to be turned out in the fields to nibble sorrel and clover-tops, when the curtain had literally fallen upon the nauseating display. But, rather, we fled from the hot glaring lanterns outside the tent to drink our coffee. The camp is low and close to the water, and, in a damp, still night, such as this was proving, mosquitoes are an active torment. They are unknown in our situation, and I had forgotten their existence until our fiery introduction at this moment. I know I could have endured it if they had merely taken a sip of my blood now and then. But they filled generous bumpers of that rich fluid, quaffing it with a gay, ringing buzz of defiance that was infuriating.

Miss Birdsell told me at dinner that Percy



Enderson had written a lovely pastoral which was to be given soon at Judge Elliott's, and that she was to assume one of the principal rôles. "I did not know he wrote at all," I had said.

"He has published a lovely book of poems about Sleep, and Pan, and Unrest. Don't you know his name?" she returned in mild reproof.

I was forced to admit that I did not read quite so much upon those topics as I had done when they first became the imperative themes of popular versifiers.

This conversation could not improve my humour. If Judge Elliott, was to give a pastoral, written by one of the rhyming biographers of poor Pan, I knew too well that my sad eyes should behold that pastoral. Consequently the young interpreter of Sleep and Unrest was henceforth my enemy. Then I could not help hearing Miss Birdsell telling Maurice in an undertone



that she had made Sister have some sort of particularly disgusting dressing because she knew it was his favourite. Maurice had exclaimed at her remembering his predilection all that time, which turned out to be exactly four days. I did not think that nearly so wonderful as that Maurice should like the dressing. It recalled Heine's graphic description, "The still wretcheder sauce, which has neither a Grecian nor a Persian flavour, but which tastes like tea and soft soap."

As these tender blandishments were going on, I looked to see Margaret talking animatedly with one of the married men.

While we drank our coffee, or I think it would be more realistic to say while the mosquitoes drank us, Margaret came to me to whisper: "Roger and I have had such an interesting talk about those cliffs over there. I had no idea they were of that formation."

“Margaret Robertson,” I said, “you did not come here to talk geology to Roger.”

She laughed a little uneasily. “No one seems to have come here to talk to me about anything else. But I will try.”

The unconscious girl seated herself by the young author, and, with deliberate fortitude, invited a synopsis of a forthcoming romance. Meanwhile Maurice was fanning Agnes Birdsell, smiling arch winsomeness into his eyes, in the charm of her gauzy pink allurements. When the monotonous ticking of Mr. Enderson’s voice ceased, it was time to go home.

As our party was starting away, Agnes discovered a splinter in her finger, which, of course, meant an appeal to the physician’s aid. The earnest practitioner led her very gravely to the light of a glaring reflector for examination. “It is nothing serious,” he called out to us. “You may go on. I will overtake you.”



Of course we would go on. I could not look at him holding Agnes Birdsell's hand. Good nights rang all about us. The Ender-sons went their way, we ours.

I wondered if the evening had been needed discipline. If I were discontented with my lot, I might have thought that dark blot of conventionality was wafered upon the crystal fairness of my existence to teach by contrast. If I had been luring Maurice to Agnes Birdsell's side, the event might have been the scene of my discovery that she would not make a wise sister-in-law. Perhaps it had occurred to show me what I would not have believed — that I could sneer at the hospitality of those with whom I had broken bread. Nothing had pleased me but that fine bit of comedy of Herriekson's. The ladies' betrimmed finery seemed less odious than the greasy salmon and the wilted ferns, though I loathed it all in retrospect, and I was not even repentant.

When Maurice joined us Margaret was discussing a new comet with Roger, and mounting rocks for a better view of it. So my brother helped me over the rough places. "Don't you think Mrs. Lyman has remarkable executive ability to conjure up so much convention in the woods?" he asked.

"Granted one wants convention in the woods, it is remarkable," I answered. Discussing anything with Roger is merely turning it over to the other side of my mind, but I was not so despicable as to criticise our entertainment to Maurice, if my thoughts *had* been base. I changed the subject abruptly, and he did not recur to it.

When Margaret and I were undressing, I watched her take off her shirt waist with a strange sinking of my heart. "Reproach me," I said. "You are too big-minded for this polluted world."

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked, turning puzzled eyes toward me.



“My judging the Lymans by our standards, and misleading you about their dinner,” I said. “The most seathing thing Junius wrote to the Duke of Grafton applies to me.”

“What was it? There were so many of those most seathing things.”

I gave her a penitent hug. She returned it fervently. Then she asked, “What did Junius say?”

“‘It is not,’” I declaimed tragically, “‘that you do wrong by design, but that you never do right by mistake.’”

CHAPTER XI

I WAS low in my mind the next day, very low. I had not been so unhappy since I had gained my freedom. I loathed myself as much now as I had loathed the salmon salad the night before.

Pride of opinion, contempt of every standard but our own, — these evils of the day, — had not been purged from my soul by its fuller existence. I was ashamed, like the other Eve in her Paradise, though with a difference. Poor Eve! I should have been sorry for her, if I had not been so busy thinking of that blessèd Moses. How much easier to be Daniel, how much easier to be anybody or anything than meek. I have known much good in the course of my

years, but only three human beings that were really meek. Two of these were men, but there was one woman, from which fact I dare hope that some random seed of that rarest virtue may yet mature in my own spirit. I marvel often that we think so little of him who was greater than the greatest hero of us all — the supreme attainer of the well-nigh unattainable. Venerable Moses, my soul is low in the dust before you.

From contemplation of my own future crop of humility, my thoughts swung back to consideration of that potent factor in even the most humble living — respect for appearances. What other force, which involves no intrinsic value, is comparable with it? I was as sorry for Margaret and Maurice as if I had induced them to break some rule of godliness, and, too, when I knew I was right. I was unworthy of my master who said: “I sometimes try my acquaintances

by such tests as these: Who could wear a patch, or two extra seams only, over the knee? It would be easier for them to hobble to town with a broken leg than with a broken pantaloons."

Not so grim, but almost as forcible, were Lowell's words on the subject that possessed me: "The code of society is stronger with most persons than that of Sinai, and many a man, who would not scruple to thrust his fingers in his neighbour's pocket, would forego green peas rather than use his knife as a shovel."

So lowly was I that I even looked unperturbed upon Maurice escorting Miss Birdsell, while Margaret was paired with Mr. Enderson, when our young people started off for the Park where they had been invited for golf. Even that word of conventionality did not disturb my emulation of the patriarch. I deserved it, and, as for my brother's fate, if he had not been already

hopelessly in love with Miss Birdsell, his pride could not sustain the comparison my obduracy had thrust the rival into.

The thought of Margaret's heightened value, since she had been tried in that hottest crucible, and not once, even after twelve hours' reflection, hinted by word or gesture, "I thought as much," would have made the position more desperate for one less penitent, and less like Moses.

I suffered for a long time, and then I stood in the doorway and was happy. It was that early afternoon hour when the lush growths of summer seem to bear the soul upward. The flight was hushed and almost oppressively glorious. I had not the spiritual strength to bear it alone. I thought of Roger, and of how necessary he was to every exalted mood, and then the fancy seized me to dash off and tell him so.

I came, a little breathlessly, down to him working in his beloved garden. He was not

greatly surprised to see me; for my visits are frequent when he is really engaged there, though I do not so often break in upon this between-chapters exercise. He likes to get into the soil, when he is composing ahead; digging up the ground seems to unearth his thoughts, at the same time that it relaxes the muscles of his body.

After a brief greeting, he was silent. He knew that I realised he was mentally engaged. I stood, for a moment, wondering how he could pull up weeds so deftly with the tips of his fingers, and still keep those busy members white and clean.

I kicked my foot against a stone, and dropped my eyes. The sun glared down upon the homely scene. What I had to say seemed suddenly strangely out of place. I was much embarrassed, but the spirit that had led me thither made me speak, if it were but awkwardly.

“Roger,” I broke out, “it seems foolish,



now I have come. But I have been thinking — I must tell you: there is no happiness in the world without you. I am glad I am your wife.”

My husband raised his head to look in my eyes. There are no seasons and places for love. It is beautiful even in a turnip patch.

CHAPTER XII

MARGARET and Maurice were of necessity thrown more upon each other for amusement during the next week or two. The prospective entertainment at Judge Elliott's was being pushed toward success with a persistency of rehearsal that engrossed, not only Agnes Birdsell, but Mr. Enderson too, in the capacity of manager. Mrs. Lyman's aid in arrangement was likewise levied upon, and from the placid shade of our environment we would see this warm and harassed trio hurry by to their task daily and sometimes twice daily.

"What a fatiguing thing a pastoral must be," I said to my family the afternoon of the dress rehearsal. We had formed ourselves



into a relief society, and had called in the fevered sufferers, on their homeward way, to a resuscitation of cold spring water and lemonade and fruit punch. We each one had some remedy to offer, and their necessity accepted them all.

It was not the spring water nor the fruit punch that went to their poor heads, but the heat and harassment. It was after they had staggered away that I made my remark about pastorals.

We had been spending the day with the pond lilies, in the cool shadows of Crystal Lake. Gathering water lilies is one of the few forms of acquisitiveness that I cultivate; but those pure things are doomed to so short a life where their lots are cast that I enjoy sometimes snatching them from the untimely fate of the inevitable destroying insect. We brought home a basketful on this day and laid them in a cool pool in the Vosenkill in front of our home. We enclosed



the little inlet with stones that the flowers might not float away, for we wanted to watch them uncloset with the morrow's sun; and then we seated ourselves on moss-grown rocks close by to gloat over their waxen, sleeping beauty at short range. I believe we all tried that evening to lift our conversation to the level of their inspiration. Margaret and Roger succeeded, and I do not think Maurice and I were as commonplace as if we had been gazing at a potato patch — or a pastoral.

That fateful word brings my narrative back to the invitations that had come to us for a garden fête to be held at Elliottiana. Each message was written upon a roll of birch bark and tied up with dried grass. The man who brought them, in a fascinating box, with those for the Lymans and Endersons, gave at the first glimpse the impression of a vender of some sort of edible delicacy. Roger had rushed up to him with kindled appetite.

My poor husband expected a delicious tample, and was handed a bark invitation.

“Roger, you are looking murderously after that poor fellow,” I said as the retreating footsteps crackled more faintly over the dead leaves of the distance. “Why will you harm him? He is only an accessory to the crime.”

I know it was simply because he was tried beyond human endurance that my husband said the most malicious thing he could think of. It was, “Mary, I believe you want to go.”

However, that bit of connubial theatrics is as dead now as the lost tragedies of Sophocles. I forgave him freely, and borrowed some cuff buttons of him to wear to the festivities. Neither Margaret nor I had deemed it fitting to bring any more elaborate costume to the woods than one of white pique. After we were dressed in these toilets of crackling freshness and our two handsome men had



donned duck trousers and jaunty jackets, our vanity swaggered a little. I wondered if our neighbours would wear French gowns. They did not do that, but when they joined us *en route* they were clad in the debatable finery of dinner-party fame, with the effect heightened by elaborate opera capes.

We started off in a heterogeneous group, but I soon saw that Maurice was walking by Agnes Birdsell's side. In the excitement of her histrionic anticipations she was one of the loveliest bits of girlhood I have ever seen, a certain arch vivacity lending a touch of spurious brightness. Margaret's solid worth was striding in approved gymnasium gait with Mrs. Enderson. Ah, well, I had determined to struggle no longer with fate. Maurice might always find beauty so rare the most desirable wifely endowment. For myself I knew that I undoubtedly needed as well as deserved such discipline, but Roger did not. Fortunately there is always some



reason why we should continue to hope that Providence may yet be kind.

Judge and Mrs. Elliott and the Misses Elliott were standing to receive arriving guests upon their wide veranda, which was hung about thickly with Japanese curtains, for what reason I could not discover, unless it was to shut out the air and run up the family thermometer. The Judge is one of those natural braggarts who deal exclusively in superlatives. The last time he visited us he was declaiming about how much money his brother had lost in a western mine. This afternoon he said after the first greeting: "I don't suppose there is a hotter place anywhere than this. My thermometer didn't go below eighty-seven any day last week. There wasn't another one in the Park above eighty."

I expressed my polite surprise and moved on. Mrs. Elliott had been fanning my other cheek with the remark: "One day it was



ninety-three. I think it was. Judge, wasn't it ninety-three here the day before the thunder-shower?"

"Of course it was, but it's been worse than that," the fever-producing voice persisted, its owner following me on to my greeting of other friends, although none of the men of our party had yet been welcomed. "I tell Mrs. Elliott she will smother you all in that little tent to-night."

I turned my eyes after his to the lawn where a tent of gay awning cloth was stretching its empty sides in greedy anticipation of coming victims.

"If you are determined to kill us," I laughed with feeble jocoseness, "I think I will petition for freezing to-night."

He gave me what Sydney Smith called "a ready-money smile," and proceeded to clasp Roger's sensitive fingers in his embracing patronage.

I asked Mrs. Elliott, merely by way of



making talk, who a fine-looking old gentleman was who had attracted my attention by his isolated position in a remote pagoda on the very outskirts of our host's grounds.

"That person? Let me see," she hesitated. "I will ask the Judge."

"No, no," I interposed. "It is not of consequence."

But protests were futile. Our party was stayed in impatient congestion until the Judge could be disentangled from his duties sufficiently for this ominous message: "I will tell her all about him as soon as I can get away from here."

He did give me a biography, mostly speculative, of the nice-faced old dear who deserved a better fate. I was carried to a rustic seat for the purpose. The Judge is generous of words. I listened to him for a full half-hour while I saw my party hopelessly scattered, sauntering about in pairs or in large groups hither and thither, in a real at-

tempt, I think, to evade the sun, for there had been a ruthless levelling of trees at Eliottiana, though promenading to music was the ostensible moving-spring of action. The programme was conversation and music and strolling until the rustic supper was served, and then the feature of the day — the pastoral play.

After leading me with pompous ceremony to the remote seat our host spread himself out beside me with his most judgified expression. “Now let me hear,” he said, “just what it is you want to know.” And he proceeded to question and cross-question me until my poor, innocent make-talk speech loomed up before me a condemnatory utterance of state importance.

“I think you have misunderstood me,” I urged, when I could wedge that many words into his earnestness. “My remark was the merest bit of idle curiosity.”

The Judge nodded his head. “That is all



very well. I haven't misunderstood you. The case stands thus: You asked Mrs. Elliott, did you not, who old Mr. Estabrook was? Now the fact is," here he lowered his voice to a mysterious whisper, "I really do not know. But I think I can find out for you."

"Judge Elliott," I protested, "I do not care. It makes no difference whatever."

"I beg your pardon. It makes a difference to me. I want to oblige you."

"It is such a trifle."

He nodded sagely. "I believe I could learn just what you want to know from the Rev. Mr. Graham. Estabrook goes to his church. I will write to him to-night."

"I cannot allow you to go to that trouble for a mere whim of mine," I began a little stiffly, for I was really worn by his persistency.

The Judge pouted out his lips, as he does



in his most impressive moments. "I want to find out for myself too," he admitted. "I had a voucher of respectability, signed by the Reverend Graham and some others in Newtown, where he has always lived, when I sold him the land for his cottage. All I know besides is that he was in the paint and oil business for a good many years. He seems to have saved a fair competency and retired. I can easily find out more, and I will. I didn't want to slight him, to-night, when all the rest of the Park would be here. He's all right anyway. You needn't be afraid."

"I am not afraid," I cried hotly. "His fine, gentle old face speaks for itself."

My indignant gaze turned away, and at once it was softened by the dignified approach of the subject of our conversation.

"Here he is now," the Judge exclaimed, stepping forward with portly patronage. "Let me introduce Mr. Estabrook."



The coarse-grained Judge, rubbing the patrician soul of the ex-paint-and-oil merchant with what Thoreau called "the greasy cheek of his kindness," set my blood to tingling. I looked up into the soft brown eyes under a thick thatch of grey hair. Our spirits touched, as our hands clasped. There were no stiff bows of convention's ordering. We met like returned kindred. The Judge rolled his condescension heavily away over the gravel walk, and I made room for my friend on the bench beside me.

We held no very definite converse. It was more that I opened the windows of my soul to flood consciousness with the radiance of his love for wood and pasture, for sky and mountain top. Where that radiance finds a home, celestial reciprocity maintains. I loved old Mr. Estabrook and he loved me.

"Come," I said presently. "You must see my husband now."

He imitated me in rising, his kindly

smile encouraging me to say: "My husband's name is Roger. He's the loveliest man —"

"I guessed as much," my friend answered.

"Which?" I laughed. "Roger, or lovely?"

"Both," he said. "You look as if your husband's name was Roger, and as if he were lovely, too."

"Good," I cried, taking the arm he offered me. "Our spirits can have no secrets. You know it already; but you make me think of the Psalmist David in his grandest moods."

"Oh, my dear," he said, fluttering a little with pleasure. "Is not that your husband?"

"Of course it is. Roger, Roger, come here!"

He obeyed me. The men clasped hands. Roger, too, had another friend.

I was in a delirium of impatience to show Mr. Estabrook to Margaret. He seemed the touchstone of spirituality now. Roger had not disappointed me and neither would Margaret, I knew, though I was almost afraid to put her to the test. There was some little difficulty in finding her, but at length we came upon a pavilion in which was a group of some half-dozen pretty girls with one very young man penned in by their gauzy skirts. Their occupation was appropriately light banter, nothing but that. Margaret's expression was what might have been expected had I been a relief expedition arrived at the exact moment when the last drop of water had been apportioned. She excused herself quickly and came out to me. I presented Mr. Estabrook. She looked up into his dear old eyes. Their hands, too, met. We were a party of four friends.

Presently we were asked to select, for the rustic supper which was about to be served,



one of the little tables strewn over the lawn. Maurice came to urge Margaret to join a group of girls who had wound their gossamer web about him, hand and foot, as only such frail young innocence can bind and tie. She begged to be allowed to stay with us, and I added my protestations to hers. Our party was so complete, so exactly what it should be, that I was willing to brook, for its sake, Maurice's veiled impatience.

The rustic supper was served by maids dressed like dairymaids. Bright tin plates and cups were used, but their simplicity was marred somewhat by ornately heavy silver in the form of knives and forks and spoons. The menu was fried chicken with brown-bread sandwiches; watercress salad with pickled artichokes, wafers and cheese; baked apples and cream with gingerbread nuts and sugar jumbles; iced coffee and tea in tin cups. The small tables were spread with coarse crash squares, with centre



decorations of brown ginger-jars filled with buttercups and daisies, or with pink and white clover. We were a very merry party; and if we did not eat greedily of the substantial bounty, it was merely that we were too busily talking. It was not because we were reserving our appetites for what the Judge had promised me in whispered confidence, as we were taking our seats. "The women folks would have this," he said. "They read about it somewhere. It's all rustic, you know. But, after the pastoral, you will have *my* supper."

"You are very hospitable," I murmured to his back, for he had already begun his apology to the next tableful.

I do not know whether it was Roger or I — we were all so united in our conversation — who told Mr. Estabrook about our new life. But one of us said that, when our simple little home was completed, it looked, with its extended wings, like a contented cockerel



about to shrill his happy bragging, so we named it Chanticleer on the spot, and gave it a motto from Thoreau, "I do not propose to write an ode to Dejection, but to brag as lustily as Chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbours up."

"Then you too love Thoreau?" our listener smiled.

I said, "Yes. I was sure you did. Of course one wishes sometimes he was not so wilfully pagan; but I care more for him than for many writers that I never disagree with, and beneath the skin of acerbity there is always mellow sweetness."

My answer was the beaming glance of approval. That was the end. Our happy meal was over. Maurice joined us and we went to the tent where camp-chairs were arranged in long, close rows facing a verdant rostrum. This was fashioned by enclosing a square of lawn with tubs of tall shrubbery and great



boughs of evergreens hung with gay Japanese lanterns.

There was a little subdued music from mandolins behind the oleander trees, and then Pan himself emerged from the cedar shades, looking very conscious, whether because of having been so much in print of late, or because of the conspicuous bearskin robe covering his nether limbs, I cannot say. At any rate he played tremulously; and, behold, twelve young girls, Agnes and the Misses Elliott among them,—I was about to say trooped forth. But they must have flown. They were butterflies, with gauzy wings and long antennæ shooting out from caps that matched their diaphanous gowns. Agnes was a yellow butterfly, as she is brunette. The blondest girls were blue, or green. Guided by the soft notes of Pan's flute, they flew to some gigantic red paper roses which drooped their stems upon the grass, evidently for that purpose. Here the butterflies performed

gyrations and things, half dancing, half gymnastic, and all calculated to heighten the colour of the audience's cheeks. My mind is rather hazy as to what it was all about, but I know it lasted a long time, and that there was a second scene into which a lamb garlanded with daisies was led by a golden-haired child in a white frock, and that the lamb was determined to play the leading rôle and was always getting itself in the way of the butterflies, which, after the first act, changed to roses with long green leaves at their sides, and thin gowns in the colours of the queen of flowers — Jacqueminot, Maréchal Niel, Bon Silene, and white. As they were even larger and bolder than the paper roses growing amid rustling foliage in long rows of glazed jardinières, they plucked these and tossed them contemptuously about, while they danced, and danced, and danced more. As well as I could see over my blushes it was still Pan who discoursed the wailing notes



that incited them to their revelry. Presently Maurice put Margaret's wrap about her. "You are tired," he said, "and the air is too close here for Mary." We all arose quietly, and withdrew, except patient Mr. Estabrook.

Outside the tent we found our host and hostess hurriedly superintending some later arrangements. There was to be a platform dance, and fireworks, besides the spread that the Judge could hardly bear to hear of our missing.

"My sister is feeling a little ill," Maurice explained. "I cannot allow her to remain."

"You see what it is to go out in your physician's company," I smiled, hastily withdrawing my hand from the determined judicial grasp.

"Have some ice-cream now," our host said. "Here, Simmons, get some ice —"

"No, no, no," we laughed back. "Thank you so much." I think it was all we could



any of us do to keep from breaking into a run. After we had gained the first slope of the forest, I said to Roger: —

“What is that banging noise behind us? Not an ice-cream freezer in pursuit, I hope. O dear! There! I am not at all like Moses.”

“Why, Molly,” he laughed. “Who ever supposed you were?”

I tossed up my head rather haughtily. “I am a great deal meeker than I once was, receiving other people’s opinions and standards in a really lowly spirit — sometimes.”

Then we both laughed, and I caught his arm to skip him over the pine needle path, in spirited imitation of the flower-girls.

It was a lovely night. A beneficent full moon flooded the winding, tree-lined walk with its mystic glory. A soft breeze fluttered the alder bushes and sprayed us with the faint scent of clematis. Roger and I had started on in advance of the others. After

my one gay outburst, I strolled leisurely along upon his arm, cooing happy, low-voiced prophecies to him. Maurice's stand had been wine in the blood of us both.

"This night, this moon, this romantic walk will do the rest," I gurgled. "Go as slowly as possible, Roger. Sauntering is the only pace for sentiment."

"How glorious it all is," my husband said, drawing in a deep breath of satisfaction. "I wish every fellow had time to make love to his wife. Do you know, dearest, you were the prettiest woman there to-night?"

"Why, Roger," I murmured, transported with delight. "I was wondering, all the evening, how such a handsome man could care for a black little creature like me."

"Oh, my dear," he cried in pained protest.

"But, Roger," I went on, drawing closer to him. "It is not so much — looks that I mean. You are so — so — noble." The

word came hard. It is always difficult to extol those we love best. "In all the seven years I have lived with you, I have never known you to even think a really petty thing."

He pressed the hand on his arm with a reverence that awed me. "No man could be bad with such a wife," he whispered.

We were very quiet after that. But the more familiar landmarks became, the more slowly we walked. Each moment was a celestial era. We could not bear the thought of a finale. I lifted my head to look and to listen to the night, poignantly conscious not only of my own heart-throbs, but of my husband's too. "If it might be always so," I sighed.

"And we cast anchor here through the eternities," Roger answered fervently.

"How tired you must be to-night, Mary," Margaret's voice called to us. "Would you care if we went first?"



We stepped aside, and they passed us, darting off through the moonlight like a pair of belated wheelmen.

Roger and I stood for a moment looking blankly into each other's faces. Then my husband bent over and kissed my trembling lips.

CHAPTER XIII

WE had asked Mr. Estabrook to come to us very soon. He did so. It was not more than eight o'clock on the morning after the *fête champêtre* when his kind eyes looked in at our door. We *were* glad. I saw him first, and after I had welcomed him warmly I called to Margaret and to Roger to come quickly.

They were as surprised and as delighted as I had been. Our guest beamed with tranquil pleasure through all our eager greetings. Then he told us he had found a deserted humming-bird's nest as he came thither. "Would we care to go to see it? It was not very far away, and so much prettier where it hung than if he should bring it to us."



Of course we wished to go. Humming-birds' nests are nature's crown jewels; some of us had never seen one except in collections.

As we started off I noticed Maurice wandering toward the observatory, looking rather disconsolate. I told the others to go on, and went back where I could call an invitation to him to join us. I knew he would not care for the nest, but he might like the walk.

Almost the first words he said when he reached me were, "Mary, I must leave you to-morrow."

"Why, Maurice," I gasped, "you take away my breath."

He smiled somewhat wanly. "There is but one week left of my vacation. I think I will spend that at the Bay."

I knew he had been receiving invitations for yachting expeditions and house-parties to every point of the compass all during his



stay with us. He is exceedingly popular and engrossingly preëmpted. We had wondered considerably that we could keep him as long as we had.

“You will leave an ugly gap behind, Maurice,” I said. “You seem part of our life now.”

He wheeled about to look in my face. “Mary,” he began passionately, “I cannot tell you what all this has been to me. But I really can stand it no longer.”

“It must be lonely for you,” I murmured, trying to keep the hurt out of my voice.

“I do not mean that,” he said. “It is your happiness together, Roger and you. I cannot endure to watch it one day more.”

He was looking down the path where Margaret walked between the two men, her broad shoulders rising above the sumach branches. My eyes followed his. “Maurice!” I said, starting toward him.

He nodded his head.



I caught his hand for a sympathetic instant. "Have you — have you told her?" I asked.

"No, thank fate," he said bitterly. "I have not been quite such a fool."

"Then you do not know. That sort of woman can never be reckoned upon."

"Why, Mary," he exclaimed fiercely, "she cares more for that old codger down there than she does for me."

I appreciated his suffering too keenly to note the aspersion of my friend. I merely repeated that he could not be sure, without the test of question.

He stopped quite still to stare at me with deliberate savageness. "Would any living woman have walked at that pace last night with a man she cared for?"

"No, Maurice, candidly she would not. You are quite right," I answered. "There is no balm for this hurt. I can only pack your trunk and wish you Godspeed."



I was very anxious to ask what it all meant, but of course I could not then. Presently my brother said faintly, "I would stay the week if I thought it would do any good."

"No," I answered. "Your first plan is best. We shall miss you sorely; that may be the awakener of more serious emotions." I felt that if he had only been in love since the night before he could hardly have exhausted his powers of endurance. Perhaps my face registered this thought, for he flung out the ejaculation:—

"I am sure I have been patient!"

"Patient?" I cried. "Why, Maurice, what is twelve hours of patience?"

He turned, and I followed to walk back over the ground we had come. "You said twelve hours, Mary. I suppose you meant twelve months. But it is more than that. Ever since I first saw her, two years ago, I have suffered this torture."



He was so good-looking and well-groomed, so capable of enjoyment, and his successful life so crowded with pleasures, that he seemed an absurd victim of torture. I almost smiled. But pain in young eyes is too incongruous to be unmoving. When I looked at him narrowly every thought but pity died.

“This is all an enigma to me, Maurice,” I said presently. “I suppose you are still talking of Margaret.”

“Whom else —” he began, then stopped and changed colour. “She could not possibly think herself — but as if she cared! She would dance at my wedding to-morrow. The Lymans have been kind and invited me to their camp. The sister is phenomenally beautiful. I always enjoy watching her. But I do hope you — and everybody (that is, if she cares) — understand that I only went as the most casual acquaintance. Young Enderson was nearly always there, too.”

“But I should not think you would have wanted to do it, Maurice, if you cared for — her,” I argued weakly.

“I did not especially, even at first, but I had no excuse to offer. And after — Margaret came, I hoped she might be a little sorry. It sounds asinine in connection with her, but most women would have been a bit piqued perhaps.”

Sometimes I am very dense, and then I am tiresome. “Maurice,” I said, “you know I believe you, but you certainly treasured that pencil drawing.”

“Of course I did and I do,” he answered gallantly. “It is a charming little sketch.” There was an afterglow of mawkishness that stirred my blood jealously for Margaret.

“It looks no more like the Vosenkill than it looks like Willow Creek,” I cried.

He stared blankly. “It is Willow Creek,” he said.

“When did Agnes Birdsell ever see Willow Creek?” I demanded.

“I have no notion what Miss Birdsell has seen or left unseen,” he answered with rising dignity. “Margaret made me that drawing. It shows a great deal of artistic talent.”

“Maurice,” I said, “this explains much. I do not doubt your affection now.” And indeed I did not. “Margaret is not the sort of girl to be won by any of the old weapons of love’s warfare, jealousy or even devotion. You must make her proud of you. Successful surgical operations will work wonders. A little ridicule won’t hurt your cause, and it must be braced at every point by dogged determination.”

“Thank you for everything, Mary,” he said; “your advice and your sympathy and all. I shall always be obliged to Roger and you for letting me see how happy a husband and wife may be.” He changed colour at the



sacred words, and I smiled gratitude and encouragement to him through tears.

“Don’t you think we would better join the others now?” I asked.

“Yes,” he answered. And then, when we had nearly reached that busy group of investigators, he said, “I am glad you liked the little drawing.”

CHAPTER XIV

MAURICE was too serious in his love to ridicule Margaret as I had suggested, though he tried with fervent exactitude to carry out the other hints. I had not meant, by determination, sticking to her like a burr, but so he interpreted the advice. I was feverishly nervous at seeing him constantly in her way for the next few hours. The poor girl was scarcely granted space in which to breathe, so completely was she hedged about by his broad shoulders.

I sent him with some word of message to the farmer who brings our necessary stores, and then I slipped out to join him when Margaret was engaged indoors with her voluminous correspondence. I could not let



her guess that she was the central figure in a plot.

“Do you still think I would better go away to-morrow, Mary?” my brother asked wistfully.

“By all means,” I answered firmly. “And, Maurice dear, do not believe me indelicate, but I did not exactly mean by persistency, standing about always close enough for her to touch. That might get to be a little — a little —” I could not think of a gentler word, so I was obliged to say “nauseating.”

Maurice turned his starlike eyes, pathetic with tender misery, full upon me. “I hope you are not giving me wrong advice, Mary,” he said. “I certainly am growing confused. Remember my whole life is ruined if I make a mistake now.”

My head swam giddily. But every woman is officious. To interfere in affairs of the heart is the breath of her delicate nos-



trils. Frightened as I was, I stood my ground. "You must ask her to marry you before you go," I said stoutly.

"Why, Mary," he cried, "I might as well think of asking you."

"One cannot foresee what such a girl will do. And then, at the worst, you will know just where you stand."

"I know only too well now," he struck in desperately.

"Possibly," I agreed, "but it will be best, in any event, to have her getting accustomed to the idea. Our more intellectual young women are not like the old-fashioned sort that Dr. Holmes spoke of as always having an answer trembling on their lips for every unmarried man they meet. I do not really suppose Margaret has ever seriously considered marriage for herself, and I think there is a tacit agreement between her and her sister Claire not to marry. They are perfectly contented in their family life — the

daughters and a sympathetic mother. I have heard all their plans for a congenial independent future together. The sooner some attractive suitor presents another view of happiness the better. She must not become irrevocably confirmed in her opinion."

"I am sure I am willing to do anything that has hope in it; but I confess this does seem utter folly."

"It will be," I answered, "if you go about it in that hopeless spirit. You must assume a manner of command. As if the thing were altogether feasible; if not now, why, in the end, there would be no escaping it. Not a vain man's point of view, but a fatalist's. Give her worth its full due, of course. I know of a case where a man proposed futilely to the lady of his heart on five different occasions. On the sixth he remarked, 'This is the last time I shall ask you. Will you marry me?' She said Yes.



My dear, that waiting affection had grown to be so vital a part of her existence she could not have lived without it."

Maurice shook his handsome head. "It does not seem to me that I would ask even Margaret six times. But maybe I would. I should not have expected, once, to become this meek ass that I am now. When I begin to bray, pen me up with the cow. I sha'n't care."

"Your fate does not lie that way," I said, patting his arm caressingly. "It converges with Margaret's. You just see. There! I think I won't go any farther. Whatever we do, we must not let her guess collusion." He took off his hat gravely, and I slipped away.

There was no time to lose, if I was to get Maurice off the next day. So when Margaret started down the path to meet the man who brings the mails late in the afternoon, I motioned my brother to go with her. It

was a bold move. My heart pounded like a horse's hoofs on a hard road.

I could think of nothing else, so I interrupted Roger. He laid down his pen, for I was drawing the long breath of garrulity as I came.

"Roger," I whispered, "Maurice is in love with Margaret. And so he is going away to-morrow."

"Well, he ought to go away," was his answer, "if he has fallen in love with two women in three weeks. There are no more here, so he must seek new quarters for next week, must he?"

"I suppose you are cross because I disturbed you," I pouted. "But it is more than three weeks, and he has not been in love with two women. It has been Margaret all along. Two whole years — and she made the sketch — and it was not the Vosenkill at all. It was Willow Creek, and Maurice thinks it is charming. You need not look so



contemptuous. They are good, honourable people, if they don't know very much about art."

Roger laughed. "I don't suppose they would steal our spoons. But I should think Maurice might know something about perspective, if he *is* a specialist."

"He has enough else to think of," I answered coldly. "He has cared for Margaret all this time. He knows she doesn't love him, and now he has gone to ask her to marry him. *I* am sorry for Maurice."

Roger stared at me. I suppose I was a little wild. "Why should he ask her to marry him if he knows she doesn't love him?" he demanded.

"I told him to," I said.

"Mary," Roger burst out, "explain rationally what this is all about."

I tried to do so. But there were so many "this afternoons," and "the day before yesterdays," and "last summers," as there al-



ways are when one is not quite sure one has been very wise, that I think Roger was confused, and I know I was. Before my recital had closed Maurice came to look for me. One glance at his face was sufficient to make my footsteps toward him drag heavily.

“Well, Mary,” he said, as soon as we were alone on the big rock, “it is over.”

“Not over,” I answered stoutly, though with trembling lips, “just begun, Maurice.”

He shook his head.

“Though perhaps I ought not to have submitted you to *this*, for some possible future good — ”

He stopped me generously. “You are an angel, whether a mistaken one or not. Don’t worry about me. Margaret is not disposed to, and I sha’n’t let you.”

“What did she say?”

Maurice straightened himself against the old pine. “Oh, all those things you said she



might; about an independent existence being necessary to her nature, and the unlikelihood of finding any other relations so congenial as her home life; and everything that a practical man could not make head nor tail of. I suppose she meant she was too happy as it is. But her first look of surprise was enough for me. I saw she did not want me, and I did not seem to care why."

"What has become of her?" I asked.

"We fell in with Miss Birdsell and Mr. Enderson, looking for the letter-carrier too, and I left her with them. You think I ought to go to-morrow, Mary?"

"Certainly. The earlier the better."

"Very well. I suppose you are right."

"Maurice," I said, "I am sure I have not made a mistake, but I am frightened now."

He took my hand in his. "Dear little sister," he said, "whatever happens you

have nothing to regret. You have given me your whole sympathy, and that is not done every day."

Men have even more of the nobler traits than women, I believe, but unselfishness is not one of them. I had always supposed Roger had a monopoly of this virtue; but, now that I saw Maurice's face full only of concern for me, I felt that even Margaret was unworthy of him, but that, if he wanted her, he should have her, if only strength were left me to fight with fate. "You are just like Roger, Maurice," I said with a sob in my voice.

"Hardly that, I am afraid," he answered, pressing my hand with fraternal kindness. "But, Mary — don't worry about this. It is not of the least importance. I shall probably forget all about it in a day or so."

CHAPTER XV

MAURICE went away the next morning, with a face that did not look as if he were in a fair way to forget his troubles.

Roger's own taste is so nicely balanced that he is altogether intolerant of errors in appreciation. I accused him afterward of snubbing his brother because he chanced to value a rather faulty drawing. Of course my accusation was denied. Roger said he did not suppose Maurice would care to be coddled by him as if he were some lovesick swain, implying that one was enough to play that part.

"I believe, Mary," he declared, "that you fed him with a spoon and put sugar on his bread." It was my turn to deny now, but I

knew it was best for the cause to have Maurice's place empty, though the maternal in me did cry aloud when his large-eyed misery marched off alone.

It was difficult to keep a sharp note out of my voice now and then in talking to Margaret. I may have misjudged her, but I felt that, instead of missing our brother, she was relieved by his absence. I have often heard her say: "I do not find men so congenial, some way, as women. Of course Roger is not meant. He is always — not at all like a woman, but fully as charming."

I was sure her unconcern at this momentous time was not assumed. I missed my brother with pronounced tragedy, until Roger gave me a hint that I was rather playing to the galleries, and then, some way, I could not do it at all. It is so hard to be anything but hopeful in this Eden. My prayer for Maurice's happiness became the contented chirp of a trustful robin.

Margaret went upon a tour of solitary observation one morning while I was briefly engaged. We found that she did not call our flower intimates quite so much by their formal botanical names as she had done. Some of the poetry of nature was beginning to glow in her blood. We might yet instil another form of sentiment, I thought, when she came back from what we call the Clematis Jungle, vowing she had no other love but that. She gave me also then this short human record:—

“Mr. Estabrook was sitting on the knoll that looks past the creek over the south side pastures. He was startled and exceedingly perturbed when I called out to him. And, Molly, this is spotless truth: he certainly hid something behind the bushes there before he came down to join me. For a long time after he seemed nervous and shaken.”

“The place is now complete,” I mocked, “if we have a mystery too. He has probably



been burying a dead kitten. Run back and ask him to dinner."

It was a day of domestic excitement. We were to try for the first time our own sweet corn that had been raised by our hands with patient care and exultant joy.

Then Margaret and I had made, very early in the cool morning, rival loaves of brown bread. She had had the benefit of more cooking-school lessons than I, but I was older than she. It remained to be seen which of those light, crusty squares would prove more toothsome. I had a presentiment, some way, that mine would be better, but I noticed that Margaret went oftenest to look at hers when they were set out to cool.

To cap these inspiriting events, was not this the day in which the little churn for which we had sent to town elected to appear? It held about a gallon of our rich Alderney cream. It turned with a crank and was altogether the most fascinating of small imple-



ments. It entertained us out under the sweet hemlocks back of our house, Margaret and Mr. Estabrook and me. And while we were rhythmically turning we could look up into the clematis-crowned knoll. My fat robin censor perched on a neighbouring bough to nod encouragement. I was glad he was pleased, for he had grown critical since he first followed us from his old haunts on the edge of the woods in that unfriendly attitude of robins amid a wilder environment. Now he had brought a mate and set up housekeeping near us he had assumed the privileges of confidential neighbour, and I was growing fearful of his blinking, critical eye. So I was glad, as I say, to find it glittering approval of our occupation.

I inaugurated the proceeding. The others were company, to be sure, but then it was my churn. Margaret gave up her place to Mr. Estabrook sooner than I felt that even he deserved. A serious fault of men is that they



never know when to stop, once they begin anything like that. Beaming complacently through his eyeglasses, Mr. Estabrook churned and churned. Finally in response to my wistful glances he did say, "I am afraid, my dear, I may be keeping you from this." I did not even whisper No. I slid into his place with honest alacrity, but, just as my eager grasp was laid upon the handle of that alluring crank, Roger hurried out to us.

"Let me do that, Mary," he said. "You must be tired." 

That husband of mine churned until all the delightful yellow mass had come — was there. The butter was made. It was Roger who had felt the thrill of the golden arrival through his pulses. Four eager heads bent over the open churn. It was tremendously exciting. Then I brought the wooden bowl, and, with much verbal assistance from the men, transferred the butter to that for the



making, which none of the others seemed to covet. It was charming occupation, though, working and moulding that soft, rich, yellow stuff, pressing out the buttermilk and finally sculpting it into an orthodox roll. We were so impatient to try it that we concluded to have our meal at once. This was to consist of the young, tender, deliciously sweet corn, the fresh brown bread with the new butter, and glasses of cold, rich milk. Just as the corn began its savoury boiling there was a stir outside of our home, and, behold! Miss Amanda Decker evolved. 

I had written her, early in the summer, begging that she would come to us whenever she was moved to do so. Her inclination had shaped itself at dawn that very day, and so, by two different farm-wagon routes, she had wound her way to us. The last stage of the journey had been under the escort of our letter-carrier — the boy who lives in the homestead standing at the edge of the forest



as if it might be our lodge. I was glad she acknowledged our freedom sufficiently to send no warning. The surprise was delightful.

All through this fine morning the shadow of commonplaces lurked. Duty was calling us to the Lyman camp. Those neighbours had surprised us by appearing, the evening before, to pay a farewell visit. The ladies of the party were hungering for some sort of excitement, while the head of the family was depressed into active melancholy by his present environment. They could endure it no longer, they announced rather resentfully, as if we were responsible for their sufferings. The example of our happy condition, which had misled them, was, we could see, a grievance which they were making heroic efforts to conceal.

Under such circumstances I had no voice to refuse the vague offer of many things that would hardly "be worth moving," but that



might serve our purpose. I knew the suggestion was a covert stab at the clean, bare room spaces we value, and my taste rose up in rebellion at the thought of poor Chanticleer becoming a beast of burden to a motley collection of useless traps.

Roger was impervious to alarm. His whole mind was given to following up Mr. Lyman's intention of never returning to the Vosenkill, by the purchase of his land here. George Lyman is a promising painter, a fine draughtsman and a sympathetic colourist, but the Central Park in early spring is much more to his taste than the bosky glen where he had settled for inspiration.

I need not have been alarmed. Mrs. Lyman is not inordinately generous. We found that the most her prudence could collect was a pile of paper-covered novels. "They are not worth much," she said shamelessly, "but they serve to kill time."

I started. We were so remote from that



point of view. The words of him who knew so well how to live rang in my ears, "As if any one could kill time without injuring eternity."

While Roger and Mr. Lyman were completing business arrangements, Mrs. Lyman called me aside elaborately for "a little candid remonstrance." She was disturbed, she said, by the thought of our remaining in that isolation through the autumn. She knew, of course, we could not endure it during the winter, as we now expected to do; but she thought it was wrong to shut oneself away thus for even six months from one's fellow-man. We were placed in this world, each with his special duties toward the race. She had an odd little trick always of pressing her hand to her side in talking, and it seemed now that from there she grasped whole handfuls of these platitudes. They certainly had not been filtered through the brain.

I was thoroughly exasperated at the impli-



cation. How much good would this party do their fellow-man in the selfish routine of an extravagantly fashionable hotel, I thought. Our simple mode of living was enabling us to carry on charities on a much more extensive scale than we had ever before attempted.

We had definite plans arranged for entertaining several instalments of fresh-air children, and a number of the objects of Roger's special sympathy, boy clerks who would get no vacation otherwise. He had proposed to give a dozen active young fellows opportunity to stretch their cramped legs in our free world. Roger unmindful of his fellow-man!

We had been expecting to buy a large tent for the purpose, but it suddenly occurred to me that the one we were in would be excellent for our use, and, as Mrs. Lyman was desirous of helping humanity, she would be delighted to lend it.

I broached the subject buoyantly. My lis-

tener's face fell. "Well," she said, "really, my dear, we are very nice about that sort of thing, George and I. And I do not think we could ever bear to use the tent again, if anybody we did not know —"

"Pardon me," I interrupted, "and think no more about the request. It would be wiser for us to buy one outright. We will wish to do this every year." My indignation braced me to decline the offered novels. I said we had very little time to read. Mrs. Lyman and Miss Birdsell, and even Mr. Lyman, opened their eyes at this, but they saw that I meant it, so they said nothing, though they each had that expression of "giving us up," which is condescension's superlative degree.

We were surprised to learn that the Endersons, too, were about to abandon the woods. "They declare, if we go, they go; that one night down here alone with the whippoorwills would mean a madhouse," George Ly-



man explained. "When shall we look for you in town?"

"Almost any time as a visitor. Never, I hope, as a resident," Roger answered, and we turned away toward our other neighbours. Mr. Enderson had repeatedly invited us to a private view of the studies he had been making of the Vosenkill, and we hurried off now with an unconscious feeling that every minute counted in polite show of interest.

Miss Birdsell volunteered to accompany us, and, as we trooped along in garrulous pairs, she kept me back to tell me of her engagement to Percy Enderson. I looked into her happy, smiling face to wonder if she had ever cared at all for Maurice. The result of my study was that it makes very little difference to that type of girl to whom she is engaged. It is the fact itself, not the object, that interests her. I think very probably Maurice's superior attractions would have insured his success, if he had not dropped out



of the race. As it was, this pretty Agnes found her *fiancé's* gifts all satisfying. "He writes such sweet things, don't you know?" she whispered. "Everybody at the Park is determined that he shall get that beautiful pastoral copyrighted. They think it would be a real success brought out in book form, fully illustrated."

"Why, yes," I answered faintly, "that might be done." And, before I had need to say more, we had arrived and the author came out to greet us all and to match with his sweetheart's his blissful blushes.

The studies were well worth visiting. Faulkney Enderson is one of our most poetical landscapists. He had breathed the tenderest sentiment over the reedy banks of Farrell Creek. There was the sun sparkling on the Vosenkill, and the stream again in its deep, serious shadows; the masterpiece was early morning rising from the shores in a soft summer mist. They were very beautiful



in a contracted sense, but all the great out-of-doors was calling us away. Mr. Estabrook alone lingered as if he could not bear to part from them. When he did so there were tears in his eyes.

The next day Miss Decker asked me earnestly if I did not think Mr. Estabrook a “queer old gentleman. One of those pictures, now, of the creek,” she explained, “he said ‘was a beautiful transparent fog.’ I told him it looked to me like a great mess o’ mildew.”

CHAPTER XVI

MISS DECKER had such a refreshing way of being ignorant. In a latent state she possessed a nature thoroughly balanced for appreciation, but it had been developed only upon a very few sides. To see her mental gambols, her sensitised soul catching impressions, was like watching the ecstatic discoveries of a bright child. Anything new in the way of culture was not adopted until it could be assimilated. There was no pretence. She was frankly a student in the niceties of refinement. She knew nature and loved it. The arts were a sealed book to her.

I wondered if Mr. Estabrook would be troubled by the candour of her art criticism.



He certainly was not; for some mysterious reason it seemed to draw them more closely together and they soon developed into firm friends.

Margaret was engaged to her sister for a season at the seashore, but Miss Decker offered to remain to help me through the period of the children's visit, a plan we were putting vigorously into execution. Although Margaret promised to return to us as soon as possible, swearing fealty to us, our home, and our principles, we felt that the glamour of the outside world might prove alluring. She was very young.

After we had said good-bye to her, Miss Decker and I tried to brush depression from our spirits by a scramble through the most impenetrable part of our thicket. We made many interesting discoveries and came out, by chance, warm and tired, into the more open space before Mr. Estabrook's cottage.

We saw him, at a little distance from the



window, looking toward us. We waited openly in ingenuous expectation of an invitation to rest and refreshment. But, after a somewhat awkward delay, we were turning away when he appeared at his door. He was a trifle disturbed, but cordially hospitable. We followed him into a long, tasteful living-room, where we were seated in comfortable chairs, and an order given to Perkins, the man of all work, to bring us some iced tea.

We had a great deal to report of our tramp, to which our host listened with kind sympathy, although he was rather silent himself. When Perkins came in with the cold, sparkling glasses he said something in a low voice to his master. Mr. Estabrook changed colour. Then, calling our attention most transparently to a passing object upon the road outside, he moved softly to the back of the room, where he pushed something farther back behind the draperies be-

fore he nervously drew them more closely together.

His face was anxious when he returned to us, but he spoke coherently, intelligently upon the topic under discussion. I could not doubt his sanity, but I was sorely perplexed.

When we had started upon our way home I burst out: "I suppose he could not have been burying a kitten again to-day. Oh, it was Margaret who saw Mr. Estabrook hiding something in the bushes — not you."

"No," Miss Decker said, "I was the one, yesterday."

I stopped where I stood, my feet tangled in a coil of matted tree roots, to stare at her. "Again yesterday," I cried, "what does it mean?"

We hurried forward to consult Roger. He made light of the matter, though he did add that it might be just as well, when the

children came, to leave none of them alone with Mr. Estabrook.

“When the children came” was the refrain of our days, after the date was settled upon until their arrival was an actual experience. Our happiness took an altogether new turn in those weeks of infant carnival.

Gurgles of laughter mingled with the bird-trills at daybreak, small radiant faces were framed in the shrubbery, tiny feet waded the Vosenkill. Our path seethed with scurrying figures in that unmeaning restlessness of childhood that comes under the one generic title of “play.”

We all watched over their bliss, the two teachers who made up the regular escort, Miss Decker, Roger, Mr. Estabrook, and myself, as eager volunteers. That was Roger’s vacation. He did nothing in those memorable weeks, but feed his senses with the irresponsible eestasy, the wild tumultuous joy, of our appreciative visitors. They buzzed per-



sistently about perilous positions, in spite of our warning cries; but, by some mystic provision of nature, the tiny mite standing on one foot upon some dizzy height was no more doomed to dismemberment than the unwilling creature clasped by a detaining hand.

The day before the curtain went down upon *our* pastoral, to the ringing applause of actors and audience alike, one small visitor said to me: "That old man put something behind the rocks down there this mornin'. I asked him what it was."

"What did he say?" I questioned.

She puckered her smooth brow and thought for a long time. Then she answered slowly, "'A great sorrow.'"

CHAPTER XVII

OUR pleasure when the young men filled the camp was more sedate but no less engrossing. The drama of human interest was intense. Our lives expanded so rapidly that it was comparable to nothing so much as that sudden bursting of the sumach buds at spring's warm touch. The boys' ingenuous confidences of themselves and their families opened up long vistas of possible good. Appeal to the sympathies of the man who is living quite up to his income, if not beyond it, is a fatal blight to peace of mind. To us it was merely a glorious exhibition of newly acquired strength.

We listened, with our hearts glowing, to hopes and regrets that we had power to pro-



mote or to annul. There was no appearance of wealth in our mode of living. The artless speakers had not the least thought of addressing their fairy godparents. The sensation of becoming suddenly such was a unique experience. It thrilled us through and through. We held frequent breathless conversations as to expedients. We planned as cautiously as if we were only moderately capable of doing. But, in reality, our riches were inordinate. We had found that health and happiness cost us almost nothing, and we had an ample income. Even after prudent tithes for the future were set aside, our hands were full of benefits. There was something we could do, with wisdom, to buy each boy's peace of mind, and we did it. The impressiveness of the scenes when we gave our promise of this relief, or that joy, was unspeakably stirring.

I wanted to make converts to that sacred happiness. I had a burning desire to com-



pile sociologic works, but the difficulty is that such a treatise, to be convincing, should be in at least two volumes, whereas my theory can be expounded in two words: simplicity and sympathy. Roger calls it compressed tablets of sociology.

By the time the boys had gone back to their mechanical duties — poor dears! — September was well reached. Miss Decker had stayed with us all that time, with every pore open to æsthetic influence. Her repressed spiritual nature expanded in those few weeks with a determined force that was all healthy growth and no strain.

Shortly before her leave-taking she said to me: “If every one had his chance and failed, that would be all right. But it’s the being kept back that hurts. I feel as if I was all dwarfed and shrunk up before I came here. I’ve thought so much, lately, about my cousin Lina, what her husband — he was an ignorant fellow — said, when he



saw her lying in her coffin: 'I'm afraid she'll bu'st singin' Halleluiahs up there. She couldn't never ketch the tune here below.' There! I knew you wouldn't laugh."

"Laugh?" I said. "See! I am crying. Poor Lina!"

We went, for cheering, across the lush September pastures, skirting the long, lazy highway lined with goldenrod and wild asters mingling their rich purples with the more delicate Michaelmas daisies. Banks rose above us white with the frail lacework of wild carrot bloom, branches of brilliant sumach laid their gorgeous colour in sophisticated premeditation against the sombre grey of rough stone walls and decaying rails, struggling for space with riotous vines purple and fragrant with their clustering harvest of tiny frost grapes. The dulness of the day invited our gaze upward to the tall elms where woodbine hung in scarlet festoons.



Through rough, stubbly meadows, as through an iridescent haze of mauve and gold, the magic of aster and goldenrod, we looked off to slopes crowned with the harvest of cultivation: luxuriant rows of stacked corn with golden pumpkins glinting here and there amongst the sombre patches.

Our steps lay toward a neighbouring vineyard where choicest specimens were ours for the proverbial song. We found no excuse to go abroad for the grape cure. With appetite, time, and fruit at our disposal, we spent September feasting.

Miss Decker promised to come to us again later in the autumn or in the early winter. Margaret had begun to write feelingly of Chanticleer's exultation when ripe red October should come, but her friends and her family were engrossing, and there was "glorious, ice-spangled winter" still before us.

Roger shook his head. He said such florid



expression would not materialise a Margaret. I knew better, and I sent a long letter of encouragement and entreaty to Lenox, whither she had gone with a party of friends.

About this time I heard from Maurice that his colleague, young Dr. Duryea, had proposed his running over to Lenox with him to spend Sunday.

Ah, the whirligig of time! I wrote back to my haughty brother-in-law: "Lenox indeed! Not one step shall you go."

After Miss Decker was quite ready to take her leave of us, in that formal half-hour that precedes a departure, Mr. Estabrook came in as if in acknowledgment of some sudden determination to speak with her. I did not hear what was said by way of invitation, but, after some vague apology to us, they went off together down through the mid-day shadows of the wood road that leads to the Park.

They were gone so long that I feared our

party — Miss Decker with Roger and myself as escort — would arrive too late at the forest's edge to keep our tryst with young Mr. Jenkins and his transporting vehicle.

I think Mr. Estabrook brought her back to Chanticleer, but he did not come in to us again. Miss Decker was flushed and excited. Through the long walk to the rendezvous she scarcely spoke. Roger and I kept up a continuous stream of desultory, awkward talk. Finally we said together, with some relief in our voices, "Oh, there is Silas Jenkins now!"

Her larger luggage had been taken over to the farmhouse in a wheelbarrow that morning by the letter-carrier. While Roger was stowing away her smaller traps in the wagon, Miss Decker put out her arms to draw me to her for one tremulous moment. Her eyes were strangely bright. "I've 'most a mind to tell you," she whispered; "but, oh, I can't; not now. Wait!"



I returned the pressure of her clinging arms with a small measure of the affection I felt. Roger came toward her with his hand outstretched.

The Jenkins boy called, "Hurry up, can't you, Miss Decker?"

She said, "Yes." She was gone, rattling off down the dusty turnpike with her secret and her feverish eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

ROGER had bought in the Jenkins's apple orchard a tree just as it stood — its fruit, that is — with the understanding that we should have the joy of gathering it ourselves. They were gay, red things hanging so thickly among the green foliage as to make delay desperate. Many of our walks, during the last days before the harvesting, lay close to this fragrant possession. We would stop to gaze long and lovingly into the alluring branches of our tree, before we sat down in the grass and feasted our eyes upon the beautiful picture of a richly loaded orchard; waiting fruit, red and green and golden, stiffly pendent among the broad sweep of limb. An apple tree, from the first pink hint of blossom, until the last



belated red and russet leaves have succumbed to winter, is a friendly interest. In its naked outline, the rugged majesty appeals, too, to its partisans.

The chicken-house had proved so subtle a flatterer of Roger's ability that his presumption along architectural lines, thus quickened, matured robustly with cool weather. He conceived the bold plan of erecting an extension to our mansion for winter use — a coal bin on one side, on the other a storeroom; for now that we had bought our apples we must build a home for them.

At first Roger was to erect this structure entirely unassisted. "Why not?" I said rashly, "you like to fuss."

He raised a stern face from the elaborate plans he was drawing to repeat coldly: "Fuss? Who built that chicken-house?"

"I did. Some of it," I remarked firmly. "And the model was entirely mine."



“Yes,” said Roger, tearing up the plan he had been making. “The model was poor, Mary. You remember it would not hold chickens at first.”

“This house won’t hold apples, either,” I ventured, “if it is so loosely built. It was not my fault. The plan was nice, and I drove nails enough.”

“Was it my fault, Mary?” Roger asked coldly.

Roger is a mild man, but I dared not say yes. “It was the chickens’ fault,” I answered. “They were always pushing against it.”

Roger had some boards brought. He worked one day upon the storeroom, and then he announced that he should get a carpenter to assist him. After one day more he spoke of assisting the carpenter; and upon the third day I heard him tell some one that he was having a small addition built. He lingered about and looked lovingly at



the progress, but I think he found that "fussing" was the wound of a faithful friend.

When the storeroom was built and a supply of coal heaped on one side of the partition, the other side gaped to be filled. So we harvested our produce. We dug potatoes.

We had almost three bushels of these, which was a good many, considering how long we had been eating them. They were sound and orthodox in appearance. It produces a strange sensation to uncover a mound of ordinary dirt and to find beneath it a nest of potatoes as real as anything one may buy at the largest market, and to realise that they are yours — the product of your own husbandry. I never felt so practical and of so much use upon the earth as I did the day we gathered our potatoes. We found harvesting sufficiently fascinating to determine to make it linger as

long as possible, allowing ourselves just such hours of it each day. The potatoes were the first day's work. Roger drew a line through the middle of the patch and we began, with apparent fairness. Later on it occurred to me that, although I had as much ground-room in my allotment as my husband, I had not quite so many hills as he, for we had used more from the right side where I worked.

Roger is too fine a man to be allowed to grow selfish. So I said to him: "How many hills have you dug?"

"I have not really kept count," he answered evasively.

"But you knew, did you not, that you had more than I?"

"Not at first, Mary; upon my honour. Afterward, when I recollected, I thought it might be best so for fear of your getting tired."

I laid down my hoe and addressed Roger



with wifely thoroughness upon the fallacy of my fatigue in pleasurable matters. I enlightened him as to that dead but not yet buried day when he had made the butter, led on by his stale excuse. "To-morrow," I said, "when we gather the chickens' corn we will start free and equal."

"We will. We will, Molly," that blessed angel cried repentantly. "And shall you care at all, do you suppose, to pick the beans?"

I looked at him. "Why, of course," he said. "I will let you milk the cow to-night, too, dear."

This was more than I had expected. I do not share Roger's ardour for that one branch of domesticity. I thought very hard while I was resuming the hoe. Then I said: "No. I do not consider milking fit work for a woman." I hoped that was so, for I did not want to tell a falsehood, but neither did I want to milk the cow. Roger

was glad to be convinced. The matter was not pressed.

After we had finished our farm labours, we dressed ourselves freshly and went down to the Park to pay a round of neglected visits.

The first cottage we came to — the Morris' — was deserted. There was no sign of more active life anywhere than that of the poor stuffed squirrel over the front door.

What need was there of Roger's sharp ringing? but he thought, as one always does, that he "might as well try it," with that unconscious belief that if one gives an unusual peal there must be some response even in a deserted house.

There *was* no response. We walked on to the Tryons' cottage. There the outlook was even less hospitable. The windows were boarded up, and the doorbell had been removed. We hurried to the next one on our line of march. That, too, was closed. Then



we turned our blank faces toward Elliottiana.

The family was strewn along the wide piazza there, behind large jars of golden-rod and asters that gave out that faint disagreeable odour of the first stage of staleness. Everybody's hands were lying in everybody's laps with fixed idleness. A row of bored faces arose to greet us. The Judge was distinctly peevish. For some occult reason his *ennui* and his family's *ennui* was the fault of the smiling, happy pair who now stood before him. We had set a certain example. What had worked so charmingly with us had failed with them. The question to be faced was, Why had we done it?

"Will you take these?" the Judge began in a querulous tone, indicating some empty piazza chairs. "It is getting 'most too cool for sitting out-of-doors, but there is no pleasant place inside."

We settled ourselves silently. Then



Roger said: "There seems to have been quite an exodus from the Park," a remark that infuriated our host.

He glared at my husband before he roared: "I should think there had been an exodus. It's the pleasantest thing that ever was for us to sit here alone and twiddle our thumbs."

Mrs. Elliott whined, "The families in the cottages the Judge built to rent all went by the first of September."

"But they only came for the summer, mother," Miss Elliott struck in.

The Judge turned upon his daughter in a sort of fury. "Does that alter the fact that they have gone?"

"No," she said faintly, sinking farther back in her chair.

"I built those cottages at considerable expense — I might say, great expense, to insure neighbours. But what good did it do?"

I stated, not very opportunely, that we

had been to the Morris and Tryon and Luther cottages to find those, too, deserted.

The Judge groaned. "Of course you found them deserted. Those people wouldn't stay in this forsaken hole. One day last week Miss Tryon's *fiancé* —" here he looked at one of his daughters for encouragement which he must have found, for he made no change in pronunciation — "drove up here; I say up here; I mean, he left his horses down on the turnpike, and walked up through the pastures. No one can drive decent springs over that beastly road. The very worst one in the country anywhere, I suppose."

Here he waved his hand in outraged denunciation of the primitive highway that we had found a priceless barrier against the incursions of civilisation. "Mrs. and Miss Tryon both were so glad to see some one from the outside that they just cried. So he



got them to drive right back to town that same day with him. They left the servants to pack up and come when they could. Of course the Morrisises wouldn't stay without the Tryons. And the Luthers were called to Boston suddenly by the sickness of somebody; or so they say, but I imagine that was all made up. So here we are, left high and dry, with just the Gillettes — Miss Gillette's an ornithologist and wants to study the winter birds — and that old fellow on the south side, old Estabrook. Pleasant for us, isn't it? Probably there is not such another lonely place in the whole United States."

Roger and I made that little gurgling sound that may mean anything, before the Judge continued with the suspicion of his profession. "So those people up to the camp have gone too? I believe there was some sort of collusion in all this."

Roger tried to explain our neighbours' movements, but to no purpose. The Judge



clearly preferred to think there was, as he said, "something back of it."

Presently he demanded savagely: "What do you do with yourselves all day?"

"Not half what we would if there was more time," my husband answered.

"Time?" he shouted, "there isn't a thing here but time. I tell the girls there are ten days in every week. That woman there," nodding at the partner of his joys, "asks me all day long what time it is."

I wondered fleetingly if Mrs. Elliott had not mastered the intricacies of a clock before I began to fully realise what a complete biography of her the confidence was. We attempted to give them a brief inventory of our simple pleasures, but their hard faces seemed to extract the fragrance from everything. They could not understand. It was, as Lowell said, like presenting them with the bones of a fowl we had picked. I should have suppressed our prospective

apple harvesting, but Roger entered into a spirited recital of our anticipation in that quarter. He seemed to think one more trial would be generous. I had given them up, after they treated the history of our potatoes with silent disrespect.

“There is one thing,” I said cheerfully, as we were taking our leave; “you all keep well in this bracing air, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes; well enough,” the Judge pouted. “If we didn’t we would get right back to town.”

His tone implied that under the circumstances, health, too, was something of a grievance. We made no further effort to console them, and bowed ourselves away.

As soon as we were at a safe distance I said, “But we are not keeping that man here.”

Roger laughed with a boy’s relish. “The poor, obstinate old fellow *said* he should live here, probably, most of the year, as we did.



His health demanded the quiet. Then you remember his clinching the determination by telling every one that his daughters declared they must stay till after the holidays, anyway, and have a house-party for Christmas. His dignity is committed. He has made a public avowal of his plans."

"They hold us even more responsible than the Lymans and the Endersons do," I sighed.

The encounter had been a disturber of peace. We laughed a good deal, but it was more or less hysterical. Our souls seemed to have undergone a complete jolting.

Mr. Estabrook came out of his cottage as we drew near. His head was down and he walked by us without immediate recognition. "You are tired," I said, looking up into his weary face when we had gained his attention.

"No, my dear," he answered, "only very sad."



He joined us and we walked on silently until he broke out: "But I ought not to be sad now, either. You know of my one bit of good fortune, I suppose?"

I shook my head, and Roger said, "No."

"No?" Mr. Estabrook repeated. "Well then, some other time, my dears." He clasped my hand warmly, and then Roger's, slipping away as softly as he had come.

CHAPTER XIX

ROGER said finally that I was emulating Mrs. Elliott's inquiries into the time of day, I asked so very often if our apples were not ready for harvesting.

At last the word was given. Mr. Jenkins told us to come, and we were going on the day after to-morrow with our baskets and step-ladders to that sacred spot of our anticipations. It had been agreed that we should complete our gathering before the regular work of the orchard began.

At this crucial moment Margaret appeared. Her fine phraseology had not covered desertion, as I at once reminded Roger. Step-ladders were set up under the lower branches for her and me, and a longer ladder provided



for Roger. We had baskets to fill which we emptied from time to time into the barrels that stood conveniently near. It was a large tree and heavily loaded, and yet, for the first exciting moment I wished silently that Margaret had postponed her visit for a day or two. But when, as I hurried back from the first emptying of my basket, I stopped to look for an instant at the childlike play of her enjoyment I no longer regretted. She was very lovely in a pretty tourist's suit of becoming dark blue. Her hair flung out soft brown tendrils over her flaming cheeks and her white neck. "Isn't it exhilarating?" she called to me as I passed. "How fragrant they are; and so — gay. One must stop every few moments, to gloat over their beauty, first in the basket and then on the tree."

"I think they are prettiest among the green leaves," I called back. "Sometimes I have hardly the heart to disturb a special beauty."



“How many have you eaten?” Roger shouted from some embowered height.

“Not one,” we both protested. “We had not thought of such sacrilege.”

“That proves the superiority of the sex,” came back. “I have devoured a clean bushel.”

The branches above where I worked, somewhat later, forked together in the most accessible way. It occurred to me that there would be real advantage in slipping up the tree trunk a little distance to look down upon the glory of the full ripe orchard. So I slipped, very softly. The outlook was charming. I crept furtively on, farther than I had intended. Roger had gone down to the barrel to empty his basket.

When I had almost gained the highest point a new voice reached my ears, followed by exclamations of surprise. Then my brother-in-law, in his most conventional tone, asked, “Where is Mary?”

“Where is she?” Margaret and Roger repeated together. “She was here just a moment ago,” Margaret said, and Roger reiterated her statement before he set up an anxious hallooing.

Maurice came forward to help Margaret’s anxiety to the ground, looking upward as he did so. “There is some one in that tree,” he answered. My doom had come.

“Here I am,” I called in a shrill little voice.

The young people took that moment to inspect the hoards in the barrel. Roger ran up the long ladder to my aid. “I would not do that again, dear,” he whispered when my feet touched the ground. Then he straightened my hat and tidied me up a bit. When I looked fit I stepped forward to greet Maurice. He was very forgiving with his hoydenish sister-in-law.

“You can’t pick apples in those clothes,” Roger said. I do not suppose Maurice had



"SHE WAS HERE JUST A MOMENT AGO,"
MARGARET SAID.





a burning desire to pick apples in any clothes. He sent, I thought, a rather congratulatory glance over his fine raiment before he said: "Well, you go on with your work. I will just stand about and talk with Miss Robertson."

"But Miss Robertson wants to do it, herself," I cried.

"Oh, do you?" Maurice interjected.

"Why, of course," she smiled. "It is the loveliest thing there ever was."

"Then I will run back to the house and slip into some other clothes," he said eagerly. "Jenkins drove me up from the station. He told me you were here, so I came over across lots, and sent the boy on with my luggage."

It was not until he was gone that I began to guess how he had learned of Margaret's coming, and to laugh at his not giving me an opportunity to tell him to stay away.

We worked rather silently for a time. I

felt a good deal like a child in disgrace — I cannot tell, yet, what made me climb that tree.

Presently Margaret began singing some popular melody, and Roger joined in. They have clear, pleasant voices, though one of them cannot carry a tune very well. But it was cheerful, and the conservatory authorities tell us that even the feathered songsters are not correct; which may mean, however, that they do not make the accepted faces.

At last Maurice came swinging toward us, very handsome in knickerbockers and a modish hunting-jacket of dark green corduroy. A ravishingly becoming Tam o' Shanter was pushed a little back from his radiant face, and he was singing, in his true, sweet, tenor voice.

Margaret was evidently where she could not see him, for she asked eagerly, "Who is that?"

"Maurice," I called back jubilantly.



“Oh!” she mocked. “Our tongues are tied now, Roger. Listen to De Reszke.”

My poor brother. Must even his gifts militate against him?

I think Maurice was really more inclined to sing than he was to gather apples. He gave us, first and last, a rather full concert programme. I know it was merely a youthful overflow of good spirits, and not at all a wish to exploit his accomplishment, though I was sorry to have his choice fall upon so many of the selections Margaret had just rendered faultily.

When we had stretched our apple harvesting to its farthest limit, Roger concluded to go through the pastures to Mr. Jenkins's to negotiate for another tree. His appetite had been so whetted by his aerial feast for this fruit that the imperfect digestion of civilisation had, for years, tabooed in an uncooked form, that he decided to engage a barrel of every old-time favourite.



“We must have some great golden Pound Sweets,” I said, “and those subtly flavoured, deliciously fragrant Northern Spies.”

“But those are for fall. We must have Seek-no-furtherers and Spitzenbergs for winter use,” Roger answered slowly, for he was busily calculating the probability of our storeroom holding five barrels of apples with those other supplies we had concluded to lay in for fear of midwinter blockades.

The wife of one of Mr. Jenkins’s farmhands does our laundry work. Margaret had some excuse to go to her when Roger set off through the meadows. I knew the errand was genuine, but Maurice was sceptical.

As we were walking along alone toward our home he broke out: “This must be about equal to a second rejection. It was clearly just to shake me off.”

“O egotistical youth,” I cried, “and enigmatic. I understand, though. You

need not explain. Yes. The plea was honest."

"It could have waited," he answered coldly. "I suppose you are surprised to see me to-day, Mary. But you told me to be persistent. Keeping away from her isn't persistency."

"I only meant taking things rather for granted when you *were* with her, not being omnipresent. You must not stay about all this long autumn evening. You and Roger should go away somewhere."

"I did not come here to go away, Mary."

"Very well," I said in a tone that evidently startled him, for he added quickly, "I do most things that you tell me. How many times did that man offer himself? Four?"

"Six," I said.

There is this curious kink in men's nature; no woman can ever tell when a tranquil leading may end in sudden bolting. "I

should not offer myself six times to any woman," Maurice announced. "I do not think I should do so half that many."

We looked at each other defiantly. Presently he asked more humbly, "What is the outlook, Mary?"

"Black," I answered. "Her mother and sister are coming here to live. They are to rent the Tryon cottage. Margaret will be supremely happy with them there — after she has fumigated the Park for rusticity. She would have to be very deeply in love to listen to any suggestion of marriage now."

"Well," Maurice said, turning a whimsical face to mine. "What am I to do about it? I am certainly here, all prepared to be fallen deeply in love with."

I knew the situation must be wholesome for one who had been so courted as Maurice. But it was growing a little wearing to his relatives. Something seemed expected of



me, so I suggested: "You are too good-looking, for one thing. If you were maimed, some way, she would be sorry for you."

He laughed grimly. "I might mar my charms, perhaps, but it would be rather painful to slash oneself up and find that even then one was not appreciated. But, seriously, what difference can the mother and sister make? Doesn't every girl have a mother and sister?"

"Not such congenial ones as these. The family is altogether complete as it is. Where there are a number of women of like tastes together there is a growing conviction that the introduction of the male element spoils the cosiness and the peace."

"I can't see," my companion muttered, "what harm a poor fellow would do in a cosey home. I should think your married felicity would be an object lesson to Mar — Miss Robertson."



“Oh, but we are different. You see, Roger is such a dear.”

“Now, Mary,” he broke in, “you have no right to make Margaret think that Roger is the only man in the world who behaves himself.”

“I do not, Maurice,” I protested. “I believe you have ever so many of the family virtues. And you are growing more like him all the time. Of course you are just a tiny bit more conceited, and haughty, and overbearing than Roger. But then he has been married for seven years.”

“Umph,” said Maurice.

“Unfortunately,” I went on, “two of Margaret’s friends *have* married rather recently, and she declares that they have to entertain their husbands every evening. Laura has been a wife for the past year, and, Margaret says, she has had to play backgammon with her matrimonial venture every night except Sundays. And Nathalie

spends hers reading aloud to Horace. This is a quotation from the latter's own confession: 'He likes it, and it certainly is innocent.' "

"Well," Maurice interjected, "isn't it?"

"Yes. But Margaret says that if that is wedded bliss, she prefers to spend her evenings amusing herself. If she must keep six feet of masculinity innocent it will be in the slums, among the poor fellows that have not had so many opportunities as she has."

"But listen, Mary," Maurice said; "I haven't asked her to keep me innocent. I am not even sure I want to be innocent."

"Of course not," I answered; "but to make her understand! I hardly know what to advise. You might mention, if there is an opportunity, that you do not care for backgammon. You hate it, don't you?"

"Actively. And what else, Mary?"

"Well then — I think, if I were you, I

should sing a little to-night, and not carry the tune very well."

"What?"

"Confuse the air you are humming with something else. Margaret does."

"Does she? God bless her! I am glad she is that human. She draws so well I was afraid she did everything superlatively."

"Not quite," I said. "How short the walk over here has seemed! Could you detach your thoughts from the tender passion for a moment to fasten them to our store-room? I want you to tell me whether you think it will hold five barrels of apples, besides the potatoes and the bacon?"

CHAPTER XX

WHEN the other two came back to Chanticleer Roger had concluded not to have quite so many apples, and Margaret was full of a plan she had formed of sending our laundress's daughter away to school, such a prodigy did we believe her to be. My friend was interesting in her flushed enthusiasm, and I eager for particulars of her interview with the parents to whom she had gone to unfold her project. We had merely stopped the flow of our question-and-answer recital to breathe, when Maurice struck into the conversation with:—

“I am glad we will not play backgammon to-night, Mary. I dislike that almost as much as being read aloud to.”



Margaret looked back toward me, shuddering. "Has there been any thought of playing games?"

"No," I answered. "How did you happen to think of that, Maurice?"

He gave me an appealing glance. "Why, Mary!" he protested, in blushing reproach.

Margaret was waiting judiciously for an answer, so I muttered something about our having spoken of backgammon that afternoon.

"Oh, so you wanted to play it?" she said, turning mercilessly to Maurice.

"No, no," he protested. But Margaret returned, "I am very sure Mary did not. Now let me tell you, dear—" leaving my brother fairly convicted of a taste for backgammon, she resumed our conversation. "Let me tell you what little Sarah said after that."

I was quite beside myself until I could get Maurice alone. "You are working



awkwardly," I whispered. "Do not, I beg of you, attempt the singing. She might think you were mimicking her, and you would not want that."

He turned pale. "I should think not! I believe I will just look on after this, Mary. She thinks I like backgammon now. I tried to tell her, but you saw how she wouldn't listen. She was so busy talking about that silly girl."

There was no consoling him, so I sent him off, after our evening meal, with Roger, to return one of Judge Elliott's numerous visits of complaint.

It was a soft moonlight night, and when we thought it was about time for them to return I took Margaret with me, and we went out to pace up and down the silver path before our door. It was an hour for silence, and we talked little until we saw shadowy figures away off in the distance slowly moving near us. "Those are two handsome



men," Margaret said, as they came close enough for recognition.

"Yes," I answered hurriedly. "They are indeed that, though of course Maurice is the only Adonis."

"I think Roger is much the finer looking," she returned carelessly, darting off to meet him.

There was a funny tale to tell of Elliottiana which was given in instalments as memory served. "You can rent the Gillette cottage now, Margaret," Roger said as a preface. "The ornithologist is gone."

"What?" I cried. "I thought she would make a study of non-migratory birds."

"Ah, but she has sprained her ankle. Observation was stopped, and, presto, she has migrated herself. Judge Elliott supposes she had about the worst ankle any one ever suffered from."

"‘Sprained in two places,’" the doctor added.



“I believe we would like that cottage best,” Margaret said eagerly. “Suppose we go to-morrow to look at it.”

This was agreed upon for the afternoon. In the morning after an early breakfast, we went to church, a little building made of rough stones gathered from the mountain at whose foot it stands, and to which the road leads one a distance of six miles. We lopped off two of these by a charming walk across meadows, through copses and deeper forest bits, through turnstiles and pasture bars, over a fallen tree foot-bridge across the upper Vosenkill, through the hollows and up the heights of the sloping hills. In a clear, fresh autumn day, such as this proved, no introduction could be more fitting to the soul-lifting English service.

I had considerable hope of this walk for Maurice's suit, experienced though I was in Margaret's vagaries. But she kept close upon our heels when she was not openly



walking with either Roger or me. I caught my husband's hand, long before we came to the tree bridge, to make sure of his being out of Maurice's way. But Margaret insisted she could get over it most surefootedly unaided. Which she did.

I was so worn with the mental strain of scheming that I gave up the effort on the return walk, and deliberately set the men to arguing, Margaret and I strolling along together in silence and in peace.

Mr. Estabrook came in the afternoon before we had started for the Park, and so he went with us for the inspection. Margaret attached herself to him, from the first moment, and as Maurice was to go away early in the morning he had literally not one moment in which to wedge a private word.

I found occasion, just before his departure, to rub his wounds with the balm of hopeful smiles. I had nothing more directly medicinal to offer.

“Mary,” he said gravely. We had sought the seclusion of the spring house on the ostensible errand of getting butter. “Mary, you have been the kindest sister in the world. You have given excellent advice for the sort of man it fits — the kind, I mean, that offer themselves six times. But it does not suit me. You see what a bungle I have made of it. I have been a fool. Now I shall do my own way.”

“You tried jealousy, of your own wisdom, and did that work any better?” I said, fearful of some crazy, man plan.

“That was extreme, and foolish, too,” he answered. “In future I shall merely act on the principle, if she wants me she can have me. And if she does not want me she can leave me alone. I believe it is the only treatment for such cases.”

“But suppose some other man —” I suggested incoherently.

“If it is only determination not to marry

there will be no other man," he answered. "If it is dislike of me there might as well be another first as last. I shall not be always available, after this," he added sagely.

"I believe, upon the whole, that you are right," I said, sighing a little, for I was thinking more of the danger to him from the partiality for their favourite physician of pretty girls of the Agnes Birdsell stamp.

Maurice was gone. I found it difficult again, for a time, to be forgiving with Margaret.

After the paramount matter had settled sufficiently for anything else to rise to the surface, I asked Roger if he had noticed Mr. Estabrook's inquiring of me, the day before, just when Miss Decker was coming? He did remember, and we were at once involved in speculation. I did not know she was coming at all. She had, to be sure, a standing invitation to visit us,



but no word had as yet passed between us upon the matter.

On Wednesday I was delighted to receive a note from her stating that she would be with us on the following Saturday.

It was a week of events. Margaret engaged the furnished Gillette cottage for their experiment, and her family arrived to occupy it after the delay of but a day or two. There was hospitality back and forth, and a dark hour of inspection of the ornithologist's cabinet.

Margaret threw its doors open to me with a hard face. Mine was even sterner as I cried: "The monster! She did not care enough about her spoils of many seasons to carry them away."

There were nests filled with the eggs of the rarer songsters, in sets of twos and threes, and of the common warblers almost by the score. We faced each other, pale and speechless, Margaret and I, before the



former found voice to say, "The men she has hired to assist in this pursuit won't stop there," motioning up into the ghastly array of blasted hopes.

We concluded that she must be sent a letter of burning protest. It was obvious that we each had more confidence in our own eloquence, for we both insisted that it was too harassing a matter for the other to undertake. After a great deal of talking, and no conclusion arrived at, I finally said: "You think, Margaret, that you can write it better, and I think I can. Suppose we send two letters?"

"Very well," my friend answered. "She deserves fifty."

My communication pointed out the uselessness of the collector's practice, and the selfishness of risking extermination of the precious songsters in the name of a science that has already noted every variation in nest and egg. My words were, I thought, so



vital that, as Emerson says of Montaigne's, "If you cut them they will bleed." Margaret said the same thing in different phrases, and we were each as partial to our own as we were that day when we made the bread.

When we read the scathing communications to Mrs. Robertson she said, with the timidity of age, "I am afraid she will be angry."

"We want her to be," I answered. "If she is only hurt, she will be the martyr persecuted by ignorance, and she will go on. If she is angry enough she may think the instruction not worth the odium."

We waited eagerly to learn whether our officiousness would reach an angry or a hurt correspondent. It did both.

When the two polite replies arrived we found that Margaret's youth had made her seem presumptuous. Miss Gillette was distinctly angry with her. My remonstrance



had merely wounded. She was hurt by me. The complication left us just as much in the dark about her future course, but we had done our duty. Margaret told me she was glad, at any rate, that she had said "barbarous," and it seemed so to the point I was sorry I had not used it instead of some of my queerer words.

I was glad to turn from this gloomy uproar to a pleasant surprise. We expected Miss Decker to arrive on Saturday evening; however, some time before noon she came smiling in with Mr. Estabrook.

Roger had gone down to the orchard, but I was pleased enough for us both. After she was well ensconced her escort took his leave, saying we would like, he was sure, the first hour alone. As he was starting away he walked up to Miss Decker and deliberately kissed her. She gave a little cry of protest, turning her rosy cheeks apologetically to me.



“You know, don’t you?” he said, also looking at me.

“Why — of course —” I stammered, “I know — Miss Decker!” thinking sadly, “The poor dear *is* crazy.”

“I mean,” he said, with a fine dignity, “that she has promised to be my wife.”

CHAPTER XXI

I KNEW that whatever the mystery connected with Mr. Estabrook was, it must have been satisfactorily explained to Miss Decker. She was a shrewd, sensible woman, and old enough to understand what she wanted to do. There was clearly no need of our being anxious, and therefore we concluded to be delighted.

Roger was as surprised as I at the turn of affairs, for, as we said, they were so used to not being married it seemed strange so complete a change should have occurred to them.

After Mr. Estabrook had left us, on the day of her coming, while we were still alone, my friend turned to me with a face full of

unutterable things. "It seemed silly to me, at first, too," she said. "But, somehow, — I don't know, — I do like him." She was very sweet in her shy tenderness, and pretty enough to make me realise that she was not old at all in years. A life of hard work and suppression once supplanted by congenial ease, a different woman would evolve.

"Of course you like him. He is very lovable," I answered. "I am so glad."

"Are you?" she asked eagerly. "That is such a relief. I was almost afraid you'd think I was silly."

"As if I could think that of you," I protested, kissing her flushed cheek.

"I wanted to come to tell you. I thought I could explain better than I could write. So here I am," she went on nervously. "We thought we would be married next week. That isn't too soon, is it?"

"Not a day too soon. At your home, I suppose?"



“Because it would make them feel foolish.”

“But they do feel foolish already.”

“Then you have told them?”

“They have told me.”

Roger stopped perfectly still. He drew my hand from his arm, pressing it reassuringly in his warm clasp. “Wife, explain yourself,” he said.

“Mr. Estabrook — is going — to — marry — Miss Decker — next — week,” I answered very slowly. “Miss Decker — just — said so.”

“Oh,” he exclaimed, catching my face in both his hands and kissing it over and over. “Pardon me, you dear, sweet child. You are always churning my brain into a froth.”

I forgave him because of the kisses. After that we hurried on. “Don’t look at her much to-night,” I advised. “She is very shy.” Roger promised, but Mr. Esta-



brook appeared early in the evening and he was not shy at all. He was openly admiring and sincerely loving in a courtly, old school manner.

An event somewhat more commonplace occurred soon after this. Judge Elliott came to spend an evening with us, and to invite us to tea at Elliottiana on the following afternoon.

After stating his errand, he gave himself up to continuous complaint. "I suppose you can write your little yarns here as well as anywhere," he said to Roger. "But even you must find time hang pretty heavy, now the leaves have fallen and it's so doleful outside."

"Not a bit of it," we both declared stoutly. We enjoyed the country more than ever in its wider outlook. The delicate tracery of the grey boughs is as lovely to us as luxuriant foliage. Our vast sweep of skyscape was only rivalled now by the broad,



unimpeded view we caught of the rolling foothills and the cleanly chiselled outline of each mountain peak. "And then," I cried enthusiastically, "the wonderful atmospheric effects of autumn! One may stand for an entranced hour to watch the clouds piling up over the mountains, or a haze lifting there."

"Yes. And get a good stiff cold in his head to pay for it," he returned.

"We have neither of us had a cold since we have been here and are constantly in the open air," Roger said. "We had not realised that blessing. We walk more than ever now the air is so crisp and invigorating."

"Biting cold, I call it," our guest answered. "I'm no poet, and I say, it eats to the bone. But then a man might stand it if he had, by good luck, a bone to gnaw himself. We are all but starved; next to no variety! When the Park was fuller a vender went around every morning to take



"THE WONDERFUL ATMOSPHERIC EFFECTS OF
AUTUMN"



orders for meat and vegetables. He won't come out there just for me. My man's gone. Simmons couldn't stand it here. I can't send one of the maids over that horrible road, and I certainly can't walk it myself, to get to where one could be driven to the station. I never saw such a performance. Last week I paid their weight in gold to get a lot of things brought out, but that doesn't mean fresh meat. We have had potted stuff and bacon till it's positively outrageous. I've tried shooting, but there isn't a partridge in these forsaken woods."

Roger refrained from saying that he had better luck with partridges and that he had bagged a number of wild ducks on Farrell Creek. I did begin a spirited account of the pleasure we had found during the fall in gathering meadow mushrooms, but our guest seemed to have little credulity to spare for our fairy tales.

By way of entertainment we showed him

our new storeroom, and then took him to inspect the spring-house which was soon to be abandoned for winter. Nothing anywhere aroused his interest so keenly as a tender beefsteak stored there. He asked eager, greedy questions as to its genesis. Roger explained that Mr. Jenkins had been killing a beef, and had brought that much to us in response to a standing order for any tidbits of his handling, such as sweetbreads, or a roast when an occasional calf was sacrificed for family use, and now and then a turkey. It is seldom that he has anything of the kind to offer, but it is just often enough to aid in the variety we aim at for that one substantial, nutritious dish which continues to compose each meal's *menu*.

"This mound," I said, as we turned away from it, "is covered with a thicket of shrubbery as you could see in daylight." Roger elevated the lantern. "It is a mass of blossoms when the clematis is out."

“Yes,” murmured the Judge. “Highly probable.” And then, animatedly, “I don’t suppose that man Jenkins would come away over from his place to the Park?”

Roger thought not, as his transactions with us were something of a favour. The Judge listened dolefully. “I’m getting quite ravenous for fresh meat,” he confessed.

We would have urged him to take ours, but we knew, of course, he could not allow the sacrifice. We went back into the house and talked of many things, all of which, by some fatality, led back to our visitor’s privations. At last he groaned himself away, and we could not be sorry when his footsteps plodded with heavy portliness across our door-sill.

The next morning when we — Miss Decker and I — had begun our slight breakfast preparations, Roger rushed in from the spring-house, shouting, “That old robber has stolen our beefsteak!”

“What old robber?” we women asked.

My husband leaned against the door-post to support his statement. “Judge Elliott,” he said.

“Why, Roger,” I cried, “did you ever hear of a judge stealing beefsteak?”

“I never heard a judge declare before that he was starving.”

“But, Roger, he could not have done it!”

“My dear, we have no very great choice of possibilities. It must have been the Judge or Mr. Estabrook. Do you think the latter would have been likely, when he came to see Miss Decker, to make off with her breakfast?”

The alternative was so absurd that we were obliged to accept the first hypothesis. Roger looked pretty grave until I assured him that we could have one of our delicious omelets instead. Then he laughed till tears streamed down his cheeks.

CHAPTER XXII

It was strange to think of breaking bread with the man we suspected of stealing our breakfast — or that Roger suspected him of it, rather, for I still maintained against conclusive evidence that the deed was done by “some animal” — that vague zoölogic term that covers such a multitude of domestic peccadilloes.

The Judge's conduct, from the first moment of greeting when we arrived at Elliottiana to tea, betrayed high nervous tension. We had never found him more voluble, but his speech kept markedly remote from Park discomforts. However, when the tea tray was brought in, Mrs. Elliott bemoaned the meagreness of the hospitality. “I do not

see how one can offer more, though," she said in a voice that was like nasal intoning, "where there are no markets."

"Why," Miss Elliott laughed, "life here is getting to be just like a polar expedition."

The younger daughter struck in: "Yes. Father got some beefsteak somewhere for breakfast this morning, and we ate it like wolves."

Mrs. Elliott looked across the room to ask, "Frederick, where did you say you got that beefsteak?"

There was a short silence. Then "From a man," came hollowly from the inside of a teacup. We did not lift our eyes, Roger and I. We sat very still. Mrs. Elliott parted her lips for further inquiry. Her husband cried, "Wait a minute, my dear. Who is that on the lawn?" He shot out of the room like a convict fleeing *his* judicial decree.

"How could the Judge have seen the

lawn from where he sat?" his literal wife asked. She turned to Roger, who was close to the front window. "Is there any one out there?"

"Only the Judge," he answered. He is very tactful, that husband of mine. He diverted all those women with a thrilling anecdotal recital, so that our poor host slipped into the room some ten minutes later altogether unnoticed.

We came away as soon as we decently could. When we had cleared Elliottiana's grounds Roger's dancing eyes looked into mine. "Will you believe me the next time?" he asked.

"I will never again question even what you say in your sleep," I replied.

"We have the full play of human emotions upon this tiny stage," he went on musingly. "Every variation. Nothing is lacking."

"Even to ripe romance," I said. Miss

Decker had gone away on that day for her wedding.

Something of note transpired in the interim before she returned to us as a bride. One of my friends in town had been left, a twelvemonth before, a very wealthy widow. Many had been her letters to me of the burden of her riches after her elderly husband's oversight had been withdrawn. "Oh, the freedom of your life," her last communication had wailed. "If I could, I would throw my every penny to the mob of beggars that dog my steps, and come to your Eden a happy, poor woman."

"Come," I wrote back to her.

"I will," she replied. And there she was, upon the next day after Miss Decker had left us lonely. My friend, Marion Dalrymple, had not, as I at first feared, thrown her fortune recklessly to the winds; everything was in safe, legal hands, but she had shaken off pompous cares for herself

and come to worship at the shrine of simplicity. With Roger's advice she should, she said, have really little difficulty in disposing of her annual income upon worthy objects.

After Mr. Estabrook returned with his wife we counted ourselves four congenial permanent families in the realm of peace. The Elliotts were still fluttering, and we never knew what excuse would unfurl their wings.

The coming of a bride entailed some hospitality upon even our primitive neighbourhood, as did also Marion's advent. We paid visits and inspected new quarters, drank chocolate together, and were a little too commonplace for idealism for a few days. But matters soon settled themselves naturally, and our hours again were all Elysian. One lovely morning I went first to see Marion's clever annihilation of the Tryon's "effects" in the cottage which, probably



influenced by the sympathetic *fiancé*, they had eagerly sold to her. Then social debt drew me on to Elliottiana.

An ominous hush enveloped the place as I approached. The piazza was empty. Every chair and Japanese curtain, every gay cushion and ginger-jar of flowers, had vanished. The window blinds were tightly closed, but I rang the bell, smiling at the futility of the act while I did so. As I walked away I remembered how often the Judge had said of late: "I sha'n't keep my family forever here to starve. My first duty is to them." I was not likely to forget, either, that I had remarked to Roger, "When a man begins to talk of duty, he acts." The thought uppermost in my mind was, what explanation the magisterial speech would frame for my husband. I need not have wasted time in that speculation. He ignored the subject forever afterward in any chance meeting with Roger. It was as if

Ellriottiana had never been, nor the Park, nor the beefsteak.

After this adventure I ran in to see Mrs. Estabrook. She was standing in the door as I came over the grass-grown path. "Drinking in the glories of the day?" I called out.

"Yes," she said, "feasting on this air and light. We seem to be always having Indian summer."

She opened the door, as she spoke, into the long living room. Her husband, seated by the farther side window, jumped to his feet with a sharp cry of pain when he saw me. I stopped where I stood, petrified by the misery in the gentle face turned toward me.

"Oh, I did not know you were here, Charles, really," his wife explained. "I am so sorry, so sorry."

He bowed his head for a moment silently. And then, as if he had gained courage, he

stepped forward, and, taking my hand, led me up to the easel he had left. A half-finished canvas stood upon it. "There," he said. "You are my friend. You will only have pity. Look at that!"

I stared at the poor effort, and then at Mr. Estabrook's excited face. I could think of nothing to say. His wife explained gently: "He slaved through all his youth to buy time to paint. And now —"

"I cannot do it," he groaned. "Look at that. I call it cruel, cruel! The soul is here, burning to speak, and see how the clumsy fingers obey!"

The wild words in his gentle voice stirred me strangely. We gazed silently upon the record of failure. Finally I said, "But do you not think every sensitive being has some dumb spirit within?" I told him of the "dead poet" fancy, although I felt what his manhood could not say: the long years of uncongenial occupation, fed on



this false hope, that were smiting him now. The study before us was the Vosenkill in the bit of valley where Margaret had seen him working. It was spotty and hard. My heart pounded loud rhythmic sympathy.

“I suffer less from this crying in the wilderness since I have been here where every sense is open to sublimity. The sort of physical pulsation that comes with our most refined living, subtle but mighty, does away more and more, I find, with the need of outward expression. We are catching and holding the aroma of life. In the eternities somewhere we will give it out. Can’t you feel the complete engrossment of it all, this — this — ” and then, looking from my heart into his, that poor burying-ground of ambition, every shred of expression left me. Oh, the tragic inadequacy of mental clothing! I began and stopped and began again: “Can you not feel all this — this — thingamy?” I wailed.



He felt the word-travail, and was sorry for that cry of verbal anguish. But I was hot and cold with shame. "See," I said desperately, "I can express my thoughts no better in language than you can in paint. But I enjoy resignedly — almost always now. Won't you try, too?"

He smiled down at me with trembling lips. "I hope you will not think me a coward. But it is sad to bury the hopes of a lifetime. The poor ghosts will not stay in their graves. It is all cruel tragedy now. Some day there may be quiet tears, and wreaths upon the mounds. My dear wife is helping me to bear it with fortitude. So soon as may be we will lay aside our mourning."

Then the pathetic wildness flickered up once more in a last speech of rebellion. "But these are the first bitter months of unutterable agony. Forgive me, my dears, but I must be alone for a little." He



walked, with averted eyes, out of the room, and presently we saw him striding rapidly past the window toward the deepest thicket.

“He has suffered so,” his wife sighed.

“Yes,” I said again of my inadequacy.

“He believed, through all those years, that, with time and congenial surroundings, he could paint. He has lived for that. And when he came to try and found it all like this, he could hardly bear it.”

“Was it his studies he was so afraid of some one’s seeing?” I asked gently.

“Yes,” she answered. “Only his man knew about them. Perkins always warned him when any one was coming. Charles was so ashamed of them. But I — I think some of them are very natural: rocks and trees and water. He says the sentiment is not there; that they are just as if he did not feel. Think, Charles not feel!” I nodded, since words had proved so hateful.

“I believe,” the speaker went on in a low

voice, "it was because I could not express myself, even as much as he did, when I felt, too, that made him first care for me. He pitied me so much because of what I said about Mr. Enderson's pictures — you know, that about the mildew — that he just began to love me on the spot. I am so sorry I exposed him to-day. But, maybe — don't you suppose he will feel better now it is done?"

"Yes, surely," I answered. "The unspoken sorrows gnaw most deeply."

"Do they?" she said. "Oh, here comes Charles back again. And he is smiling."

CHAPTER XXIII

ALL this time there had been nothing heard of Maurice except the merest notes of commonplace occasionally arriving for Roger. Margaret's family were completely domesticated, and so was Marion Dalrymple; four congenial households form a delightful circle for winter to envelop. We increased our store of books and made arrangements to do much serious studying together, Roger and I, during the weeks when we should be most often storm-bound. We had cast out the heavy anchor of larger ownership; to the purchase of the Lyman acres we promptly added those of Mr. Enderson. The other two painters of the old coterie had not come to their own at all last season, and we found, upon application, that they



had settled by the sea for marine work; their land, lying between our old allotment and our new, was willingly transferred to us. The three families at what had been "the Park" bought up all the available ground there, so that our position was thoroughly fortified. Space was our draw-bridge. It could be crossed, but not without our permission.

The little snow flurries of early December invited us out-of-doors like eager children to feel the soft flakes in our faces and to watch them dashing our clothing with the marvellous workmanship of their tiny crystals. A longer letter came from Maurice in mid-December. He had undertaken successfully an almost miraculous operation. Of this he wrote me full particulars. At first I was surprised. Then I smiled. When I read it to Margaret, Claire was also present. Details that had seemed to me rather unnecessarily realistic filled them

both with eager interest and awe. Margaret had never shown so much respect for Maurice as that professional letter evoked. I noticed a slight girlish assumption of superiority with her sister. It was her friend who had done this marvellous thing.

“I am sorry you have never met him, Claire,” she said. “You might find him interesting.”

But Claire had no opportunity to meet my brother. As Christmas drew near she asked me if he were not coming to Chanticleer for the holidays; that Margaret had said he would probably do so. “Oh, no,” I answered gravely. “We shall not be likely to see Maurice for a very long time. He is slavishly engrossed with his profession. And then,” I added with premeditated malice, “he is too much sought after socially to be allowed to get so far away now winter has set in. Ah, no, we cannot expect him before summer — if ever again.”



Claire's face fell. She had made quite a hero of the young man who could cut human tissue with such delicate precision. I suppose she wasted no time in repeating my words to Margaret, for that ingenuous girl lost none in assuring me that she did hope our circle would have to admit no one from outside for the holidays. We were complete as we were.

It was during the Christmas season that Mr. Estabrook told me he was growing resigned. "It is so beautiful here, and my wife — I love my wife. We have made a bonfire of the canvases. I may yet be as happy as you, only not so young."

We were all happy at Christmas. The day before a drizzling rain followed briefly a rather heavy fall of light snow. At night this froze, and we awoke to enjoy the sunrise touching with frosty splendour a crystal world.

The air was invigoratingly sharp and



*"THE SPARKLES DANCE THROUGH THE
FROSTY AIR."*



cold. We muffled ourselves in fur and walked briskly to the Robertsons' cottage, where the settlement was to gather for a holiday dinner. Roger sang gaily: —

“The cold wind sweeps the branches bare,
And the icicles hang from the eaves,”

as we mounted our friends' steps. Margaret opened the door to us, with the answering lines: —

“The sparkles dance through the frosty air,
And the spirit its carol weaves.”

They had no Maurice to envy then. Poor Maurice! I always felt sorry for him when Margaret was gay.

The same party saw the old year out at our cottage, the first sunset of the New Year at Mr. Estabrook's, and cut a Twelfth-night cake with Marion; all memorable occasions.

Although Roger valued our winter seclusion for a large piece of writing he had undertaken, he tried to make me believe that

perhaps, for my good, we ought to go to town for a month or so, to enjoy some music, the art exhibits, and the sight of certain valued friends. I was dismayed at the notion. We had had no heavy snows yet, and I wanted to see the woods snow-bound, the Vosenkill's falls and ripples ice-encased. We must wait through January for the chief winter glories. In February there would be the enchantment of watching the longer days creep in through the radiance of spring's first stir, "when the very grain of the air is ready to split into a blue-bird's warble."

All this I suggested to Roger before I said: "We surely would not go in March, when the birds begin to come back to us. And then — the great train of interests marches in." The first green fuzz in the tree-tops, the arbutus carpet — a glimpse of its waxen, pink beauty beneath the sodden brown leaves is one of the forest's chief fascinations. Not



that I would harm a petal of its dainty life by ruthless vandalism, but to bend over it, to look, and smell, and wonder, day by day, had been a winter's anticipation. We surely would not go to town when the arbutus was blooming here. Then there were the blue and white hepaticas, the frail pink wind-flowers, and the white stars of the bloodroot yet to come, the marshes yellow with marsh marigolds, and the pastures yellow with adder's tongue; all those sweet mysteries that we had come too late for last spring. We could not miss the things that we had missed, and surely we could not forego those we already knew. "Think of the gay red columbine, drooping its bells among the fresh green ferns, and say that you would set foot in New York City in May," I cried.

Roger said, "I am glad you agree with me, Mary." I am not sorry he has a few of those mannish traits to keep him human. When he added that next year he must in-



sist on six weeks of town for me, I affected not to hear. I thought his disgust was rather hopeful when Mrs. Robertson and Claire found some excuse to call them to Boston for February and half of March.

Margaret remained stanch to liberty. We invited her to spend the weeks with us, and she gladly accepted our hospitality.

Mrs. Estabrook defied all hygienic principles by daring to develop a slight indisposition in the late winter. It seemed purely nervous, and was undoubtedly due to the strain of her husband's troubles. I was sure she would improve when his happiness was established, but he was rightfully anxious about her, and so he wrote to Maurice, to ask whether he was expecting to come to Chanticleer soon, and, if not, when it would be best to bring Mrs. Estabrook to him for consultation.

The doctor answered that the patient's condition could best be judged in her own



surroundings. He would come to us for Wednesday and Thursday of the first week in March.

I watched Margaret narrowly when these arrangements were discussed, but I could not discover that she manifested anything more than polite interest.

Maurice arrived in the early afternoon on Wednesday. Snow had been falling all the morning, and it then lay deeply where it was allowed to remain,—a boisterous wind had arisen. He was eager to set off to the Cliff as soon as he was warmed and refreshed; for the walk in from the main road to Chanticleer had already been considerable effort. It was difficult to detain him, and he had gone before I was half convinced that it was wise.

We had divided our long room off with curtains for winter use. These we drew more often when we had guests in the house. Roger was absorbingly writing now on one

side of the closed portières, Margaret and I, talking in the soft voices that could not break his train of thought, on the other.

Before I felt that he could have had time thoroughly to examine Mrs. Estabrook in addition to the walk back and forth, Margaret began wondering that the doctor did not return. Then she went to the window to introduce that nervous watching that always arouses those who had not before been anxious. Presently she whispered: "It is growing quite dark. I should think Roger would go to look for his brother. He should remember that a comparative stranger might miss our landmarks in this trackless waste of snow."

"Trackless waste" stirred my fright. It sounded so like some hideous tale of arctic adventure. I tiptoed to the curtains and pushed them a little aside to say, "Roger."

"Yes, dear," came back to me. "In just a few minutes. I am very busy now."



“But, Maurice,” I persisted. “He has gone to the Cliff.”

“Yes,” he returned again, crossing a *t* as he spoke. “He came here to go to the Cliff.”

Margaret appeared beside me to add: “Your brother does not know the way about here as we do. It is snowing furiously, and just hear the wind howl!”

Roger deliberately began a new paragraph. “Maurice,” he said, “is old enough to take care of himself. Do not let your affection run away with your common sense.”

Of course he meant this for me, but Margaret popped away from the curtain in explosive haste. She sat down and took up a book from the table with an elaborate show of indifference, though almost immediately she was leaning forward to look at the clock. Then she remarked how much earlier it grew dark on a stormy day; and should



she light the lamp? She did so, and I noticed that she pulled it ever so far along the table where it could shine out, a leading star, through the window. Presently she peeped between the curtains to watch Roger lighting his student's lamp.

"He is sitting down to write again," she said.

After a pregnant silence she opened the outside door and we peered out together into a blackness that showed faint streaks of whirling white. The wind nearly blew us from the sill. "What is Roger made of?" Margaret panted.

"Made of?" I repeated.

"Adamant, I should think," she answered. "A woman would go to look for *her* brother."

"Roger," I called. "You ought to be worried about Maurice. We are. It is perfectly dark, and a driving storm."

My husband laid down his pen and



came out to us. "What time is it?" he asked.

"Ten minutes after seven," Margaret answered, "as black as pitch, the wind is a hurricane, and your brother does not know one step of the way."

Roger smiled. "Oh, yes. I think he knows every step of the way. However, it is a wild night. I suppose I might take a lantern and walk toward the Cliff, though I dare say a great hearty fellow like that, used to being out at all hours and in all weather, will not thank me."

His voice was hesitating, but Margaret said, "Shall I light the lantern, while you get your fur coat on?"

In three minutes she had him marching off into the whirling black and white. Then I began to be alarmed for him too. We did not sit down again. We waited, standing. Anxiety is lonely. When I was at



the window Margaret was before the clock. Suddenly she cried:—

“There! What is that?”

“Only another false hope,” I groaned. “I cannot look again.” But when the stir grew into something more certain, it was I that sprang to the door. Margaret stepped back, her hands pressed over her eyes.

“Are there two?” she asked.

“One,” I said, shading my face and leaning forward to stare more desperately. “It is — it is Roger.”

Margaret gave a piercing scream and dashed past me into the night. Then the approaching mass swung into light, and I could see that there were two figures, and that Margaret was beating one of them with her soft palms, and demanding hysterically, “Where is your brother? Where is your brother?”

“There! Don’t you see him?” Maurice’s voice gasped.



Margaret started back. "Oh, it is you! I thought—" But the sentence was swallowed up in the great hubbub.

Maurice *had* lost his way. White and panting he staggered into the house, we all flying about in panic haste for restoratives. Margaret worked frantically, guided by her First Aid to the Injured lectures. I did what I could, but my friend was worth a dozen of me. It did not take long to resuscitate Maurice. In a quarter of an hour he was beyond even my anxiety, though Margaret's efforts did not in the least abate. After it occurred to me that he was rather prolonging his alarming symptoms, I proposed leaving him in the others' care while I went to prepare the food I felt he must need.

Very soon Roger slipped out to me to whisper, "If Margaret works over Maurice for twenty minutes or so longer, I think he will live till morning."



I flashed a gratified smile at him over the chafing dish. "Her methods are most salutary," he went on gravely, "especially the rubbing of the wrists and temples."

I had always found, myself, that bathing those parts with alcohol was revivifying, but it seemed to have very little effect upon Maurice. When Margaret would lay one hand down to inquire if he felt strength returning, he would silently raise the other to her. I wished rapturously that he could see the expression of her eyes through his closed lids. Then I believed that he had seen, for a brilliant colour suddenly rushed over his face and neck. He said he was decidedly improved, and I called them to tea.

Our quarters are so circumscribed that the poor dears had no time alone until the next morning when Roger went to take his exercise. I was sorry the snow was too drifted for me to go with him as I usually



did. However, I soon slipped into my room and left the young people the study bare of eyes.

When I went out to them again they were standing quite close together by the farther window. The poses were conscious. I suspected one of Maurice's arms, it dropped so stiffly by his side. We looked at each other silently. It was difficult to think of a preface. Finally I said, "Oh!"

The young man turned his eyes toward the maiden, as if he hoped she might have something to say. But she had not.

The situation began to seem very stupid and foolish. It was so obvious that they were engaged that I took everything for granted, and broke out:—

"I am sure you will be happy, Margaret. Maurice is growing more like Roger every day."

"Yes," she said. "I think Roger is quite a little like him," looking up at Mau-



rice with a face which said he was a million times better than Roger.

That was too much for me. "As if any man in this world could be as good as Roger," I cried, and just then he opened the door.

"Who pretends to my virtues?" he laughed, with a glance of understanding at the young people.

I was so glad Maurice was safe, and that they loved each other at last, that I fell into Roger's arms, crying the first tears I had shed in this enchanted land. There was no more salt in them, though, than in the drops of dew on the grass.

I am sorry to end with tears; for we were happy then, and we are happy now. And neither do I "propose to write an ode to Dejection, but to brag as lustily as Chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbours up."

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